DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 507 CE 073 905

AUTHOR	Brown, Amy
TITLE	Work First. How To Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. A How-to Guide. ReWORKing Welfare. Technical Assistance for States and Localities.
INSTITUTION	Manpower Demonstration Research Corp., New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.; Mott (C.S.) Foundation, Flint, Mich.; James G. Irvine Foundation, San Francisco, CA.; Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.; George Gund Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio.
PUB DATE	Mar 97
NOTE	140p.; For a related report, see CE 073 904.
CONTRACT	HHS-100-89-0030
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Caseworker Approach; Change Strategies; *Employment Programs; Federal Legislation; Job Training; Policy Formation; *Program Administration; Program Design; Program Development; Public Policy; Research Projects; Retraining; Services; State Programs; *Statewide Planning; Strategic Planning; Welfare Recipients; *Welfare Services
IDENTIFIERS	Personal Responsibility and Work Opp Recon Act; *Welfare Reform; *Welfare to Work Programs

ABSTRACT

This guide, which is intended for planners, administrators, and staff involved in state and local welfare reform efforts, summarizes information about the "work first" approach to welfare reform that was gained from comprehensive evaluations of work first programs and discussions with program managers, practitioners, and participants. The following are among the topics discussed in the guide's six chapters: (1) work first in a block grant environment; (2) program policy/planning (planning program activities, designing support services, tailoring work first to program goals, understanding caseload and labor market, building support for programs, evaluating program performance); (3) program implementation/administration (staff selection/training, caseload size/specification, co-location and integration of case management, promotion of an employment focus, interagency linkages, program costs/cost reduction); (4) program components (applicant job search, orientation, assessment, job clubs, job development, role of education/training, work experience and subsidized employment, retention and reemployment); (5) case management (developing employment plans, maximizing participation, motivating participants, facilitating child care and transportation, dealing with personal and other issues); and (6) related policies (transitional benefits, financial incentives, earned income credit, time limits). Appended is information about the work-related provisions of the 1996 federal welfare legislation and a 35-item list of programs, organizations, and contact information. Contains 55 references. (MN)

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Work First

How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform

Amy Brown

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Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A How-to Guide

Work First

How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform

Amy Brown

March 1997

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

MDRC

This guide was written as part of the JOBS Evaluation. The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation is conducting the JOBS Evaluation under a contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), funded by HHS under a competitive award, Contract No. HHS-100-89-0030. HHS is also receiving funding for the evaluation from the U.S. Department of Education. Funding to support the Child Outcomes portion of the JOBS Evaluation is provided by the following foundations: the Foundation for Child Development, the William T. Grant Foundation, and an anonymous funder.

This guide is being published and disseminated as part of MDRC's ReWORKing Welfare technical assistance project, which is funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, and the George Gund Foundation.

Dissemination of MDRC publications is also supported by MDRC's Public Policy Outreach funders: the Ford Foundation, the Ambrose Monell Foundation, the Alcoa Foundation, and the James Irvine Foundation.

This guide is distributed in association with the Welfare Information Network (WIN).

The findings and conclusions presented herein do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders or the Welfare Information Network.

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Preface

This guide is being published at a major turning point in welfare policy. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 has replaced the entitlement to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with a block grant that covers both cash assistance and welfare employment and training activities. The legislation gives states new flexibility to design innovative welfare-to-work programs. Many of its elements—including capped funding, time limits on program eligibility, and demanding work requirements—place pressure on states and localities to operate large-scale programs that effectively help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

Many states have already taken steps to redesign their welfare-to-work programs. One of the most popular strategies is commonly called "work first." Work first programs aim to move participants into unsubsidized employment as quickly as possible through job search and short-term education, training, or work experience activities. Programs incorporating a work first approach have been shown to produce positive impacts under varying conditions. Recent studies have also shown some of the trade-offs in this approach compared to other strategies. Knowledge about work first programs comes from comprehensive evaluations and discussions with program managers, practitioners, and participants. This guide seeks to summarize that knowledge so that program planners, administrators, and staff can put in place effective, well-designed programs. However, this guide is not meant to suggest that a work first model is the most effective welfare-to-work strategy. The best model for any given place depends on its specific goals, resources, and local conditions.

This guide was developed with two main sources of support and encouragement. First, it was conceived as part of the JOBS Evaluation, which MDRC is conducting for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with additional support from the U.S. Department of Education. The goal was to summarize, in an applied form, some of the information and insights being gained from that large-scale study and from the broader knowledge base of which it is an important part.

Second, the guide is part of a new initiative at MDRC. As a research organization, we have spent 20 years evaluating state welfare reform projects and have built a unique body of reliable knowledge about the effectiveness of different strategies for moving people from welfare to work. Our Board and staff have decided to try to do more to distill, synthesize, and share the lessons from our studies as well as our extensive field and operational experience, so that states and localities can make more informed choices as they move to reform welfare.

To do this, we recently launched a new technical assistance project, called ReWORKing Welfare, funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, and the George Gund Foundation. The project includes briefings, conferences, tailored technical assistance to states and localities, and a series of monographs on best practices. This guide is the first in that series.

We are grateful to the funders who made this guide possible. We hope readers will find it informative, and we welcome comments and inquiries about both the guide and the technical assistance project as a whole.

Judith M. Gueron
President

Acknowledgments

This guide incorporates the knowledge and experience of many people, and I am grateful to all those who took the time to provide input and advice and to read preliminary drafts.

Many outside reviewers brought their real-world experience to the guide and made sure that the information was complete and presented in a useful format. From Los Angeles County: John Martinelli, Chief of the GAIN Division; Pat Knauss, GAIN Program Manager; and staff in the Region V office. From Riverside County, California: Marilyn Kuhlman, GAIN Program Manager; John Rogers, Administrative Manager; Terry Welborn and all the staff in the Riverside GAIN office. From the Minnesota Family Investment Program: Chuck Johnson, MFIP Director; Joan Truhler, MFIP Program Advisor; Nancy Vivian, MFIP Program Advisor; and all the local staff who contributed to this guide. From the Oregon Department of Human Resources: Debbi White, JOBS Manager. From the Utah Family Employment Program: Bill Biggs, the former Program Coordinator; John Davenport, Program Specialist; and Connie Cowley, Program Specialist. From the West Virginia Department of Human Resources: Sue Sergi, former Commissioner of the Bureau for Children and Families. From the Fond du Lac County Department of Social Services, in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: Diane Hausinger, Deputy Director.

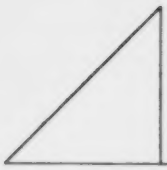
Administrators and staff of other programs and organizations provided additional insight from their own experience: Linda Wolf, Deputy Director of the American Public Welfare Association; Donna Cohen-Ross, Director of Outreach at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, for her ideas on the Earned Income Credit; Mark Greenberg, Senior Staff Attorney of the Center for Law and Social Policy; Liz Krueger, Associate Director of the Community Food Resource Center; Julie Kerksick, Deputy Director of the New Hope Project; Cathy Zall, former Deputy Commissioner, Office of Employment Services in the New York City Human Resources Administration; Anne Collins, Senior Staff Associate for the Early Childhood Program at the National Center for Children in Poverty, for her child care suggestions; Toby Herr, Director of Project Match; and Barry Van Lare, Executive Director of the Welfare Information Network.

Staff at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also provided useful guidance. I wish to thank especially Howard Rolston, Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families; Audrey Mirsky-Ashby, Senior Policy Analyst, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; Nancye Campbell, Program Analyst, Administration for Children and Families; Karin Martinson, Senior Policy Analyst, Office of

the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; and Susan Greenblatt, Chief, Technical Assistance Branch, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families.

Many colleagues at MDRC shared with me their knowledge of research on welfare-to-work programs. Mary Farrell drafted the sections on program costs, and Irene Robling drafted the section on management information systems. David Butler and Barbara Goldman provided invaluable guidance and insight. Judith M. Gueron, Maxine Bailey, Gordon Berlin, Dan Bloom, Thomas Brock, Fred Doolittle, Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton, Robert Ivry, Ginger Knox, David Long, Janet Quint, James Riccio, John Wallace, and Evan Weissman all read drafts and contributed their own expertise. Emily Bremner fact-checked the final draft. Barbara Gewirtz identified many useful resources. Cele Gardner edited the document, and Judith Greissman supervised the editorial and publication process. Patt Pontevolpe and Stephanie Cowell did the word processing. Finally, I am indebted to Jackie Finkel and Joanna Weissman, who contributed greatly to this document both substantively and through their research and fact-checking.

The Author



I.
Introduction

1. Work First Defined

There is no single model of a work first program. What defines such programs is their overall philosophy: that any job is a good job and that the best way to succeed in the labor market is to join it, developing work habits and skills on the job rather than in a classroom. Work first programs also share a strong message that, for participants, employment is both the goal and the expectation. Beyond this common philosophy, however, work first programs vary significantly in the services they offer, the sequencing of their activities, the extent to which participation is required and enforced, and even their goals and approach.

Work first programs seek to move people from welfare into unsubsidized jobs as quickly as possible, and job search itself is a central activity in these programs. However, work first is more than just job search. Work first programs generally begin with job search for most participants, using the labor market itself as the test of employability. Then, for those who are not able to find jobs right away, work first provides additional activities geared toward addressing those factors which have impeded employment. These activities might include education, training, work experience,[1] or other options. In the context of work first, they are generally short term, closely monitored, and either combined with or immediately followed by additional job search.

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) has evaluated a number of work first programs. Some of those programs are described below.

- **"Labor force attachment" approach sites in the JOBS Evaluation** (in Atlanta, Georgia; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Riverside, California).[2] Group job search (job club) is the first activity required for virtually all participants, followed by short-term education and training (and, occasionally, work experience) and subsequent job search for those who remain unemployed.

- **Riverside County, California's, Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program.** Participants without a high school diploma (or a GED—a high school equivalency certificate) or who lacked proficiency in reading and math had a choice of job search, basic education, or instruction in English as a Second Language as their first activity, though job search was encouraged. Most other participants were required to begin with job search. Riverside's GAIN program conveyed a strong message, even to those who began with education and training, about the importance of quick employment.

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1. Some use the term "work first" to describe unpaid work experience, or workfare. The definition used in this guide is not meant to include programs that are primarily workfare, although unpaid work experience can be one component of a work first program.

2. JOBS refers to the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program that was established under the Family Support Act of 1988. Funding for JOBS has now been folded into the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

- **Florida's Project Independence.** Individuals who were identified as "job ready" (on the basis of education and work experience) conducted an independent job search followed by job club and another search, which was generally followed by education or training for those who did not find a job. Those who were not classified as job ready were assigned to education or training as a first activity. The majority of the caseload met the definition of job ready.
- **San Diego's Saturation Work Initiative Model (SWIM).** Most participants were assigned first to a two-week job search workshop and then, if they had not found employment, to a three-month unpaid work experience position concurrent with biweekly job club sessions, and finally, if they were still not employed, to education and training activities.
- **Arkansas's WORK program.** All participants were assigned first to two weeks of job club followed by up to three months of individual job search. If still unsuccessful in finding a job, participants were then assigned to unpaid work experience positions.

Not all of these programs have been equally effective, and all have tailored their activities differently; yet all have embraced an approach that emphasizes quick entry into the labor market through a combination of job search and short-term education, training, or work experience activities.

2. A Brief Summary of the Research

The impact of any welfare-to-work program depends on diverse factors, such as the amount and use of resources, the mix of services provided, the message that is communicated to participants, and the quality of implementation. Given the interaction of all these factors, it is difficult to conclude that any particular strategy is most effective at helping people on welfare find jobs. However, some general themes appear to be emerging from research on various welfare-to-work programs. This section discusses some of those themes.[3]

People often associate a work first strategy with job search. But while job search is a central activity, research suggests that it is not the only important component of work first programs. Evaluations in the 1980s of programs that relied primarily on job search activities, and subsequent evaluations of approaches that combined job search with education, training, and other features, indicate that mixed programs that maintain a focus on employment can generate larger or more lasting increases in employment rates, earnings, and income than do pure job search programs. Evaluations of mixed-strategy programs in several

3. For a more detailed account of the research on welfare-to-work programs, see Bloom, 1997. All the studies cited in this section used a random assignment research design in which eligible people were assigned by a random process to either a program group, which was eligible to receive welfare-to-work program services, or a control group, which was not eligible to receive those services.

states have also shown that such programs can save welfare dollars and return more to government budgets than they cost.[4]

An evaluation by MDRC of six counties in California's GAIN program (the nation's largest JOBS program) found positive results in each of these areas. While GAIN as a whole was not a work first model, the most successful county GAIN program, in Riverside County, incorporated a work first approach for a large proportion of the caseload. For single-parent recipients, the program increased earnings by an average of 44 percent (compared to a control group) and reduced welfare payments by an average of 15 percent (again compared to a control group) over 4.5 years, and the impacts have held up over time.[5] In addition, the program saved almost $3 for every dollar invested over a five-year period.[6] Single-parent participants came out of the program somewhat better off: their average gains from increased earnings and fringe benefits, minus increased taxes, were greater than their losses from reduced public assistance benefits. At the same time, however, the Riverside program did not lift many people out of poverty and did not eliminate the need for welfare, since many participants remained on the rolls.

The ongoing JOBS Evaluation in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside is also finding positive results.[7] The work first programs in those sites increased earnings over two years by as much as $1,212 compared to a control group. Savings from reduced welfare payments over two years ranged from $368 in Atlanta to $1,338 in Grand Rapids (though some of these savings were due to sanctioning as opposed to increased employment). The JOBS Evaluation also compares the work first programs in those sites with programs in the same sites which emphasize a human capital development (HCD) approach. In contrast to work first, HCD programs generally encourage investment in education and training as a route to employment, primarily through the provision of basic education. After two years, welfare and employment impacts for the HCD approach were not as strong as those for work first. However, HCD impacts may take longer to surface and may grow over time as participants complete their education and training and enter the workforce.

The most successful work first programs have shared some characteristics: a mixed strategy including job search, education and training, and other activities and services; an emphasis on employment in all activities; a strong, consistent message; a commitment of adequate resources to serve the full mandatory population; enforcement of participation requirements; and a cost-conscious management style.[8]

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4. See Gueron and Pauly, 1991; Hamilton and Friedlander, 1989; and Riccio, Friedlander, and Freedman, 1994.

5. Lin, Freedman, and Friedlander, 1995.

6. Riccio, Friedlander, and Freedman, 1994.

7. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton, Brock, Farrell, Friedlander, and Harknett), forthcoming. For early findings from this evaluation, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Freedman and Friedlander), 1995a.

8. See Riccio and Orenstein, 1996, on the relationship between program features and impacts across the GAIN evaluation sites.

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3. Work First in a Block Grant Environment

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants created by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 give states increased responsibility for welfare programs, along with vast new flexibility and some new constraints. Appendix A provides a detailed summary of work-related provisions in the law. In general, the legislation presents both opportunities and challenges for work first programs:

- States no longer need to obtain federal waiver approval to implement many of the ideas discussed in this guide, as they did under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. However, there are some restrictions on the use of TANF funds, and states risk losing some funding if they do not comply with certain requirements.
- In the first years of TANF, many states will have additional funds (due to recent caseload declines) that they can use to make investments in a work first program. While work first approaches have been shown to return more to governments and taxpayers than they cost, there are up-front costs for hiring staff, developing or modifying management information systems, and implementing activities and services.
- The high participation rates required under TANF put pressure on work first programs to work with a broad segment of the welfare caseload. States are required to have 25 percent of all families participating in certain work activities in fiscal year 1997; this rate will increase to 50 percent in 2002 (these rates are reduced if caseloads decline). Participants must be active for at least 20 hours per week (or more, depending on which year it is, family composition, and age of youngest child) in order to count toward the required participation rates. States risk reductions in block grant funding if they do not meet these rates.
- Not all activities count toward the federal participation requirements. For example, job search counts for only up to six weeks per individual (or 12 weeks if the state's unemployment rate is 50 percent greater than the national average) and not for more than four consecutive weeks. Secondary school or a course of study leading to a certificate of general equivalence (except for teen parents) counts only for those hours required in excess of 20 per week. (The first 20 hours of required participation must be in specified work activities; see Appendix A for a complete list.) Program planners should understand these requirements and take them into account when designing their work first program. Some may choose, however, to incorporate activities that do not count toward federal participation requirements if those activities make sense in terms of the state's goals.

- The legislation imposes a five-year time limit on a family's receipt of federally funded assistance (though states can exempt 20 percent of their caseload from the federal time limit due to hardship or risk of domestic violence). Time limits increase the pressure on work first programs to serve all recipients who are subject to the time limit and to help them find employment before they reach the end of their time limit. Time limits also increase the importance of helping recipients keep the jobs they find so that they do not cycle back onto welfare. (See section 40 for more on time limits.)

4. How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized into parts that offer advice on different levels of work first program management: planning, administration, activities, and case management. There is also a part that discusses policies related to work first, such as financial incentives and time limits. The parts are divided into numbered sections, each of which discusses a specific aspect of operating a work first program. The parts and sections are designed to be read independently, so that you can simply turn to those which are of interest to you. Many of the elements interact, however, and the text provides numerous cross-references to related sections.

Throughout the guide, you will find bulleted material and checklists. The bullets are intended to highlight topic areas and thus make the guide easier to use. The checklists denote specific suggestions for readers.

The guide cites numerous examples from state and county programs across the country that have implemented various aspects of work first or have addressed implementation issues in creative ways. Appendix B provides contact information for these programs as well as for other organizations that can provide information and assistance to readers.

There is no exact recipe for implementing work first. The three work first programs in the JOBS Evaluation—in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside—all have strong results but look quite different. In any case, a guide presenting a single model would be of little use, because no single model would work everywhere. Presented in this guide are key ingredients and some ideas on how to mix them together. Given your own situation, you may want to add more or less of some ingredients, or alter the recipe in other ways.

As you read this guide, bear the following points in mind:

- The role of helping individuals move from welfare to work is usually performed by state, county, or city welfare agencies. However, many aspects of a program, or even whole programs, may be contracted out or provided through informal arrangements with workforce development agencies, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) providers, community-based organizations, or other groups. In addition, other organizations may

provide similar services on their own. This guide can be used by all these groups.

- It is important for program planners and staff to recognize the flexibility in a work first approach. If some elements do not work in your particular situation, or if you do not have control over some areas, that does not mean you cannot implement work first. Similarly, even if you would not define your own program as work first, the suggestions in this guide can help you make whatever model you choose more employment-focused.
- This guide does not describe how to build a welfare-to-work program from the ground up. You probably already have programs and policies in place, but you want to expand these programs and shift their focus to quick employment. Therefore, this guide skips over many elements of good management and planning in order to concentrate on the question at hand: How can you move your program from its current orientation to a work first approach?[9]
- This guide is being published at a time when welfare policy is in a state of flux. With the passage of federal welfare legislation, states and localities have new flexibility in designing responses to poverty, and many are rethinking their existing policies and programs. This guide presents ideas that can be implemented within a variety of frameworks. Readers should be aware, however, of any local regulations, requirements, or other restrictions—from state policy mandates to agency hiring rules—that might affect how you make use of this guide.

The discussion that follows is only a beginning. Each of the sections could easily be expanded into a lengthy paper of its own, and would still not address all the ideas, options, and trade-offs. But the guidelines presented here will point you in the right direction. Use them to make sure that you have considered all important aspects of program design; to identify your options; and to make educated choices among those options. This guide provides concrete advice for states and localities as they strive to help families make the move from welfare to work.

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9. For a case study of one program's move to work first, see Weissman, forthcoming, which presents lessons from the Los Angeles GAIN program.

II.

Getting Started: Advice on Program Policy and Planning

Part II of this guide (sections 5-13) identifies some of the questions you need to ask and decisions you need to make as you prepare to implement a work first program. What are the key challenges of transforming your current program? What mix of policies, activities, and services will form your work first model? How will participants move through the program? Who will participate, and what will the program's mandates and sanction policies look like? This part of the guide also suggests questions to ask about the environment in which the program will operate—including characteristics of the welfare caseload and conditions of the local labor market. It offers ways to build support for the program both within the agency and in the broader community, to create a larger environment that will promote the program's goals and enhance its success. Finally, it provides advice on establishing performance measures and evaluating program impacts.

5. Planning for Change

Before you begin to design or implement a work first program, take the time to assess your current program and map out where you need to go.

General Guidance for Program Planners

✔ Remember that change does not happen overnight. It takes time to develop rules and procedures, train staff, ensure that the program's message is in place, and create linkages with other agencies and service providers.[10]

✔ Be prepared to make adjustments as you go along. Change is a complicated process. If possible, pilot changes before implementing them systemwide, or phase in changes over time.

✔ Plan ahead. You can begin to put in place structures for facilitating change—such as working groups or interagency task forces—even before the exact nature of the change is determined.

✔ Make change an inclusive process. Involve internal staff, partner agencies, political players, employers, and advocates in planning for change. (See section 12 for suggestions on building support for the program.)

Transforming Your Current Program

The list below describes some common features of work first programs and outlines the key challenges for transforming existing programs to include those features. Specific strategies for meeting these challenges are offered throughout this guide.

- **Moving to a mandatory program.** Shifting from a largely voluntary program to one in which participation is mandatory involves first establishing who will be required to participate and what will be required, and then putting into place mechanisms to identify, refer, and track the mandatory caseload—both internally and in agreements with outside service providers. Staff will need to adapt to working with participants who may be less motivated and less attuned to the program's goals, or who may have more, or more serious, barriers to participation. In addition, staff will need to take on a new role—that of enforcing the mandate and sanctioning participants for noncompliance. Training staff in working with mandatory participants and communicating the program's philosophy to staff and service providers are important steps in implementing a mandatory program. Finally, voluntary participants often enter a program already knowing what they want to do or already self-enrolled in education or training. A critical policy decision is whether to accept these self-initiated activities. Staff may also need to spend more time helping

10. See Behn, 1991, for more on managing change in welfare employment programs.

mandatory participants identify their goals and develop their employment plans.

- **Expanding participation.** Many programs that currently serve only a small segment of the caseload will want to work with a broader portion of the caseload as they shift to a work first model. The task of expanding participation is made somewhat easier in work first programs by the relatively rapid flow of participants into and through the program. However, moving to a full-scale program will require increasing capacity in terms of staff, resources, facilities, activities, and service providers. Systems for tracking, monitoring, and referral of participants will also need to be enhanced to make sure that participants do not get "lost" in the enlarged program.

- **Shifting to a quick-employment focus.** Many welfare-to-work programs implemented under JOBS focused on connecting participants to educational opportunities as a longer-term employment strategy. While education can be an important part of a work first program, the emphasis on quick employment requires a fundamental shift in the activities provided, in the order of those activities, and in the philosophy under which the program operates. Some time needs to be spent reorienting staff and service providers to the new philosophy, developing stronger job search and employment-related services, designing new assessment tools and performance measures, and reworking agreements with outside service providers to promote the new focus.

- **Changing notions of "employability."** Many programs begin with assessments that separate out participants on the basis of education levels and determinations of "job readiness." Others reflect the philosophy that participants face multiple barriers to work and that employment is not a realistic goal in the short term. In contrast, a work first model generally begins with the expectation that everyone is capable of finding work and lets the job market itself—through job search activities—determine who is employable. Program planners making this shift need to rethink both when assessment is conducted and what is included in the assessment. They also face the substantial challenge of communicating the program's new message and moving staff to a philosophy of high expectations, in which a belief that all participants can succeed is put into practice.[11]

- **Focusing on outcomes.** Many programs, whether they embody work first or another approach, focus primarily on the processes involved in bringing participants into the program and then maintaining them in the program. A key challenge in implementing a strong work first program is shifting the focus of staff and management toward getting participants employed. Administrators should define program goals in terms of

11. For more on implementing a high-expectations program, see Bardach, 1993.

desired outcomes and measure progress toward those outcomes, while taking care not to promote such undesired results as "creaming"—that is, working only with those participants who are most likely to succeed. This shift in focus can also be addressed through staff training, clear communication of the program's message, establishment of performance measures, and other tools. Finally, simplifying and streamlining paperwork and administrative tasks, as well as providing clerical and systems support for those tasks, can free staff members to focus on getting participants jobs.

- **Implementing a high-performance program.** Many programs may appear to be work first, but include only job search, have only individual job search, or operate weak job club activities, which act more as job readiness or career exploration workshops. Research suggests that stronger group job search activities and more mixed program models can be more effective (see section 2 for a summary of the research). Moving to a high-performance work first model involves putting into place quality job clubs and additional employment-focused activities for those who do not find jobs right away. Training for staff and agreements with service providers will also need to be revamped to put the improved work first model into practice.

6. Program Activities and Flow

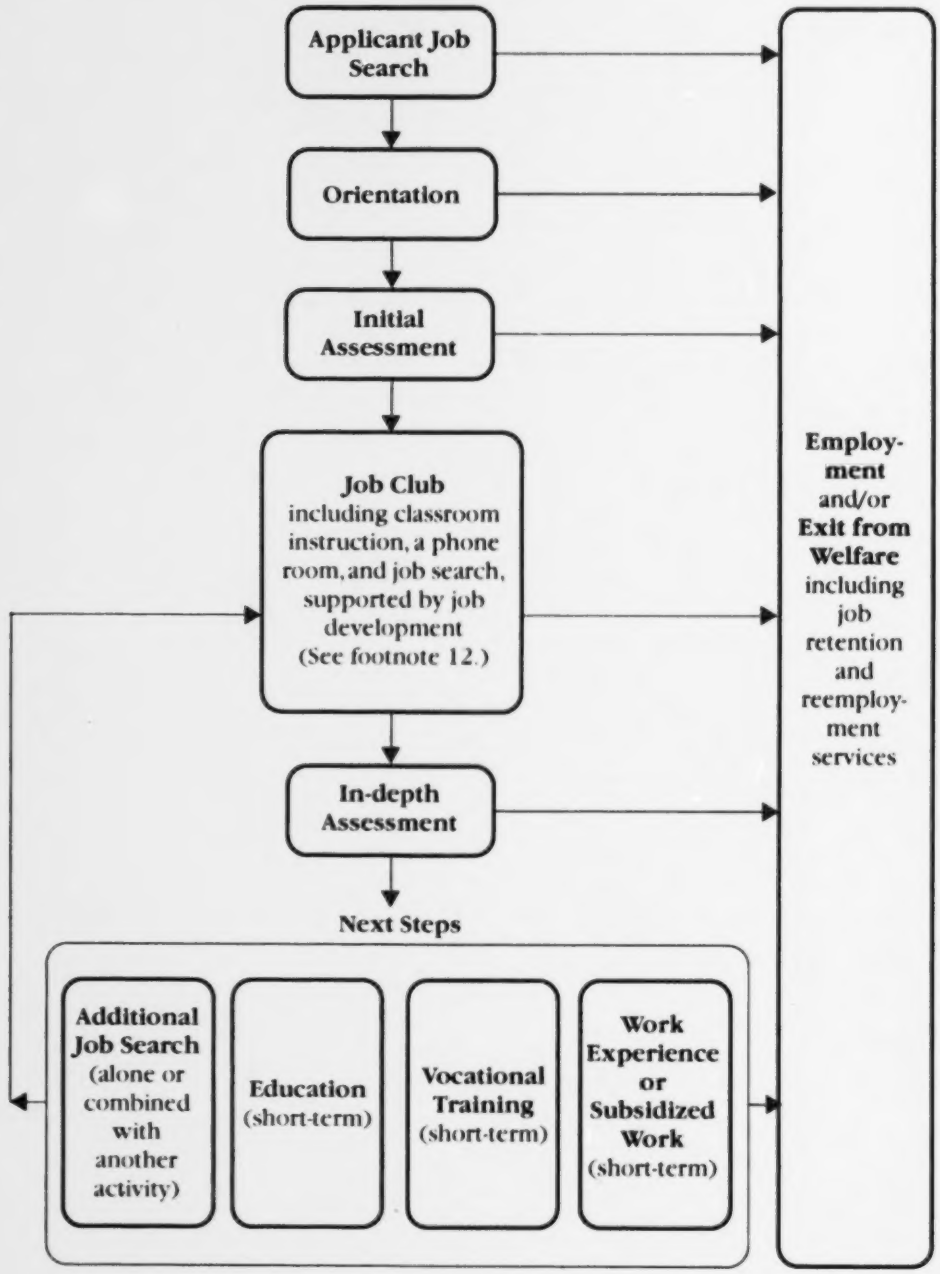
While there is no single work first program model, most share the same core components and the same basic sequence of activities. This section describes the basic work first model and some variations that program planners may wish to consider. Sections 7–9 discuss options for child care, transportation, and other support services; participation requirements; and mandates and sanctions. Section 10 provides a blueprint for how program planners can tailor a work first approach to reflect different priorities and goals.

Figure 1 presents an example of the flow of work first participants through common program components. Below is a brief description of each of the components, which are discussed in detail in sections 23–31. Not all programs include all these components, and some vary the order of activities.

- **Applicant job search.** Some programs precede work first with an applicant job search, to divert some applicants from coming on welfare and to send a message to all applicants about the goal of employment.
- **Orientation.** The actual work first program begins with an orientation, which can vary in length and content across programs and may be integrated with the initial assessment or the first day of job club.
- **Initial assessment.** The initial assessment is generally limited to identifying and addressing immediate barriers to participation and employment,

Figure 1

Common Work First Activities and Participant Flow


Applicant Job Search
Orientation
Initial Assessment
Job Club including classroom instruction, a phone room, and job search, supported by job development (See footnote 12.)
In-depth Assessment
Next Steps
Additional Job Search (alone or combined with another activity)
Education (short-term)
Vocational Training (short-term)
Work Experience or Subsidized Work (short-term)
Employ-ment and/or Exit from Welfare including job retention and reemploy-ment services

such as lack of child care or scheduled court appearances. Some participants may also be identified for exemption or deferral at this point.

- **Job club.** In keeping with the work first philosophy of quick entry into the labor market, the first program activity for participants is usually group job search (in the form of job clubs), sometimes supported by job development.[12]

- **In-depth assessment.** An in-depth assessment is generally reserved for those who do not find jobs through job search. The goal of the in-depth assessment is to identify additional activities that will help the participant get a job as quickly as possible.

- **Next steps.** The variation among work first programs mostly occurs at this point. Program planners need to devote some thought to what services and activities will be available to those participants who have not found employment through the initial job search. Common post-job-search activities include: education or training; work experience or subsidized work; or additional job search. Job developers and case managers may also work more closely with participants at this point.

- **Renewed job search.** In the context of work first, the "next step" activities are generally short term and are followed immediately by additional job search, as the labor market is constantly tested and retested. This is a critical point for work first programs. Close monitoring and follow-up are necessary to ensure that participants remain on track as they move through multiple activities.

- **Retention and reemployment services.** Some programs provide services aimed at helping participants succeed in jobs once they have found them. These services include preparing participants ahead of time for what they may experience on the job and providing assistance after they leave welfare for work. Some programs also offer reemployment assistance, to help those who lose their first job find another one quickly.

Not all programs will choose to incorporate all these activities, and some programs may choose to add others or to alter the order of activities. Participants can also conduct concurrent activities—for example, by combining education with part-time employment, or work experience with continued job search. Concurrent activities can be a useful way of allowing participants to improve their skills and enhance their opportunities, while still promoting the employment goal. The design of other policies and services—including child care, transportation, and other supports, as well as financial incentives and other strategies to make work pay—completes the program mix.

12. The Riverside, California, GAIN program is a notable exception to this sequence. Riverside sent many participants to education first and produced strong impacts.

7. Support Services

In addition to the activities outlined above, work first programs generally offer support services to participants. The most common of these are child care and transportation assistance. The supports enable parents to participate in the program and help them succeed in the transition to employment. This section discusses some policy options regarding support services. (For suggestions on how program staff can help participants make the most of available supports, see section 35.)

Child Care

Without child care, many parents will not be able to participate in a work first program. Child care needs may be more urgent in work first than in other welfare-to-work approaches because of high hours requirements and because of the push to get parents participating quickly. Programs aiming for broad participation should therefore ensure that child care is available and affordable for all those who need it. Conversely, programs that cannot or do not provide adequate child care assistance will need to limit participation requirements accordingly. Policy decisions must also be made regarding the types of care that will be funded, the method of payment, and the level of assistance the program will give parents in locating care. In some programs, child care subsidies remain available after participants leave welfare for work, to ease the transition and help make work pay (see section 37 for more on transitional benefits). Program planners might also wish to consider providing child care assistance to those at risk of coming on welfare, if that assistance can help them remain self-sufficient.[13]

Many child care arrangements are unstable, and breakdowns in child care can force parents to make new arrangements. Also, as parents move through the program—for example, from job search to training to employment—their child care needs may change. Child care assistance needs to be flexible enough to accommodate such changes without disrupting participation. Some programs provide on-site drop-in child care for parents to use when meeting with program staff or participating in program activities. Program administrators can similarly encourage outside service providers to co-locate child care with activities. Such co-location can facilitate program participation and give parents an opportunity to see for themselves how a child care center operates. However, parents will still need to identify longer-term child care arrangements when they begin work. The move into work will be smoothest if parents already have stable child care arrangements in place.

The cost and availability of child care vary by the type of arrangement and the age of the child. Child care provided by licensed child care centers tends to

13. For more on child care usage rates, types of child care arrangements, and participant perceptions, see Martinson and Riccio, 1989.

be the most expensive type of care, followed by regulated family day care (care provided for a small group of children in the caregiver's home) and then by informal day care (care typically provided by friends or relatives). Infant and toddler care tends to be more expensive than care for older children. In addition, there are commonly shortages of infant care, care for children with special needs, and after-hours child care. A program's participation requirements will affect child care needs and costs. For example, exempting parents with very young children from program participation minimizes the need for infant care. Demand for child care can also be reduced by coordinating participation or employment with school hours, to the extent possible. (See sections 21 and 22 for more on child care costs.)

Transportation

Most programs provide transportation assistance to participants so that they can attend program activities and look for a job. This may be in the form of passes for public transportation or mileage reimbursement for a participant's own vehicle. Passes or reimbursement can be distributed either by work first staff or by service providers, and on a monthly or more frequent basis. The more frequent the distribution, the more closely participation can be monitored. Many programs have also increased the permitted value of participants' vehicles so that they can have more reliable transportation. Helping participants to get a driver's license or to clear driving violations, or providing assistance for car repair, can also keep clients mobile.

Some programs offer private van or bus service to program activities, particularly if public transportation is limited. Because of the need for participants not only to attend program activities but also to go out and look for jobs where those jobs are located—which may not be near public transportation routes—work first programs may need to deal creatively with transportation problems. For example, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, uses both program vans and volunteer drivers with their own vehicles to transport participants to interviews, training programs, job search classes, and employment (for the first few weeks, until permanent transportation has been arranged). While such a strategy can facilitate job search and increase participation rates in program activities, participants will still need to arrange their own transportation once they get a job.

Other Support Services

Many programs provide assistance to participants in other areas, such as work clothes, tools or other equipment, and books. Clothing assistance may take the form of a clothes closet with clothing that participants can use for interviews or a job, or of vouchers to a local thrift shop or clothing store. Some programs give participants a flat "participation allowance" to cover any job search or work-related costs.

8. Participation Requirements

In establishing the participation requirements of a work first program, planners need to address three basic questions:

- Who should participate?
- How many hours should they participate?
- What activities will count as participation?

This section addresses these questions and discusses some strategies for working with hard-to-serve participants.

Who Should Participate?

In general, work first programs extend participation to as broad a segment of the welfare caseload as possible. Most limit the criteria for exemptions or deferrals, and some have eliminated exemptions entirely, establishing "universal" participation. Broad participation helps to convey the overall message that employment is expected of all welfare recipients. Another reason for broad participation is that it is difficult to predict who will succeed at getting a job; even criteria like education or work history do not work well as predictors of "employability." A high-expectations program begins with the belief that all participants can succeed and allows the job search itself to determine who is employable. In addition, states may need to bring a large portion of their caseload into program activities in order to meet the participation rates required under federal law (see Appendix A). While there is no clear evidence that certain strategies are most effective for certain groups (such as teen parents or long-term recipients), research has shown that a work first approach can benefit many different types of participants.[14]

Universal participation takes on added importance in the context of time limits. Programs need to work with all those who are subject to a time limit, to help them become self-sufficient before they reach their cut off date for financial support. If programs cannot serve everyone, then criteria for exemption or deferral from work first need to be coordinated with exemption from, or temporary suspension of, the time limit (see section 40, on time limits).

Exemptions and Deferrals

Despite the push for broad participation, program planners may decide to exempt certain categories of recipients from participating in work first, either because they feel participation is not appropriate for those groups or because they cannot provide the services that would allow those groups to participate.

14. Riccio, Friedlander, and Freedman, 1994.

Planners need to decide not only what the criteria for program exemption will be but also what documentation will be required for individuals to meet those criteria. Note, however, that individuals exempted—or deferred—from work first are still included in the calculation of federally required participation rates (except for parents of children under one year of age, who can be exempt under TANF; see Appendix A).

Welfare-to-work programs have commonly exempted some or all of the following individuals:

- Pregnant women
- Teen parents enrolled in school
- Child-only cases
- Individuals of advanced age
- Parents with very young children[15]
- Parents who are ill or incapacitated, or caretakers of ill or incapacitated family members
- Parents residing in remote areas
- Parents who are already employed for a substantial number of hours per week

Most programs also grant temporary deferrals for individuals who have a short-term reason for nonparticipation, such as a family crisis, a short-term illness, legal problems, or completion of self-initiated activities. Deferrals can be productive program components if individuals are able to use the time to address the reasons for the deferral so that they can participate. However, having standardized deferral periods may unnecessarily increase the length of time that individuals do not participate. Establishing deferral periods on a case-by-case basis and closely monitoring progress during such periods can eliminate delays. (See section 33, on maximizing participation.)

Targeting Resources

In a program environment with limited resources, program administrators may wish to consider whether to target certain groups of welfare recipients for participation. Spreading resources too thin can result in a program that is less effective for any group of participants. Perhaps the biggest mistake that program planners make is failing to prioritize those who will get served if resources run out or are cut back. Leaving that decision by default to overloaded line staff can result in a program that serves only those who are most motivated and most likely to be able to find jobs without the program's assistance.

15. More programs now require this group to participate. However, program planners should be aware of the increased cost and limited availability of child care for very young children.

The trade-offs associated with targeting various groups may be summarized as follows:

- **New welfare applicants.** Strategies targeting new applicants aim to get people off welfare while many of them have recent work histories and before they become "trapped" in a life on welfare. However, targeting new applicants means that funds are being spent on individuals who may soon leave welfare on their own or who may never begin receiving welfare benefits.

- **Long-term welfare recipients.** Because many recipients will leave welfare quickly on their own, some welfare-to-work programs concentrate their resources on long-term recipients. For example, in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), single parents are required to participate in employment-focused case management after they have received benefits for two of the last three years.[16] However, waiting to require participation may not change the overall culture of welfare, and many would not describe such programs as work *first*. In addition, while mixed programs have shown impacts for most major subgroups of participants—including long-term recipients—there is less research evidence showing what specific strategies work well for this group.

- **Teen parents.** There is a strong incentive to target teen parents, who are at especially high risk of becoming long-term welfare recipients.[17] However, it may be more appropriate to consider other strategies for this group, such as encouraging high school completion. (This is an allowable work-related activity under TANF.) The work first philosophy and employment message can still be integrated into those other strategies. (See section 28, on the role of education.)

- **Volunteers.** Running a voluntary program is one way of deciding who gets served if resources are limited. (Note, however, that state plans submitted under TANF must outline how the state intends to require recipients to work once the state determines the parent is ready to engage in work or after two years on assistance, whichever is earlier. See Appendix A.) To avoid serving only the most motivated and job ready—who would be more likely to volunteer but may least need the program's services—voluntary programs need to work especially hard at marketing the program to bring in a broad cross-section of participants. Work first programs can also adopt a mixed approach, in which participation by some groups is mandatory while other groups can volunteer. In addition, if there is a long wait before even mandatory participants enter the program, you may want to give volunteers the chance to move ahead in the queue. The inclusion of some volunteers, who are likely to be highly

16. In an expansion of MFIP to an additional county, participation is required after one year on welfare.

17. Bane and Ellwood, 1994. For more on programs targeting teen parents, see Maynard, Nicholson, and Rangarajan, 1993; and Long et al., 1996.

motivated, can improve the atmosphere of the program and inspire other participants.

How Many Hours Should They Participate, and What Activities Will Count as Participation?

The number of hours of participation required varies across work first programs. Many require from 20 to 30 hours per week, in order to intensify participation and make the experience of being in the program equivalent to that of working in an unsubsidized job. However, planners of programs with broad or universal participation may want to consider lower or more flexible hours requirements. Increased hours will mean increased costs for child care and program activities, as well as reduced flexibility in tailoring plans to participants' situations and needs (see "Working with the Hard to Serve," below). The programs that MDRC has studied averaged less than 20 hours per week of required participation; research has not yet addressed the question of whether increased hours will improve program impacts.

A similar trade-off occurs in defining what activities will count as participation. In most work first programs, participation is defined in terms of involvement in the program components (job search, education, work experience, and so on) described in section 6. However, planners aiming for universal participation may wish to provide some flexibility in allowing participants to meet the requirements through a combination of program components and other activities, such as counseling or volunteer work.

In order to count toward participation rates under TANF (see Appendix A), individuals must participate in specified activities for at least 20 hours per week (or more, depending on which year it is, family composition, and age of youngest child). Some program planners may decide to require participation for more or fewer hours than the participation standards specified under federal law, or they may designate different allowable activities. Participants who are active for fewer hours than the federal standards, or are in activities other than those specified in the federal law, will not be counted as participating for the purpose of federal requirements. However, policymakers may decide that different standards can be more effective given their situation and resources. Furthermore, states can reduce the federally required participation rates by reducing their caseloads through an effective work first program.

Working with the Hard to Serve

As participants move through the program, more and more will find jobs, leave welfare, become exempt, or be sanctioned. Those who remain in the program are likely to have greater barriers to employment and to need more intensive assistance.[18] It is important to recognize that some welfare recipients have

18. See Riccio and Freedman, 1995, for an analysis of the characteristics and employability of long-term participants in California's GAIN program.

serious health, mental health, substance abuse, or other problems, and to be prepared with strategies and policies for working with those individuals. Section 36 offers advice for case managers on dealing with these issues, but the hard to serve should be considered in the larger policy context as well. The extent to which their problems can be addressed so that participation is possible depends partly on the nature of the problem, partly on the flexibility built into participation requirements, and partly on the availability of services in the community to assist individuals with these problems. It may make sense to reassess the situations and needs of participants who remain in the program for more than a certain length of time, and to formulate policies that focus attention on these hard-to-serve participants.

Program planners may also wish to consider using a broad definition of participation that encompasses a variety of activities and levels of involvement. For example, Utah's program requires universal participation, but allows parents who are not immediately able to look for work to meet the mandate by participating in mental health counseling or other activities that lead toward the goal of employment. Administrators in Utah found that universal participation requirements without such options can lead to excessive sanctioning, as staff had few options for assisting hard-to-serve participants. While counseling or similar activities will not count toward reaching participation rates required under TANF, planners may decide to allow such activities anyway, if they make sense for the work first program.

Another option is to limit up-front exemptions but allow back-end outlets for those who are unable to participate or find jobs. Under this approach, the program's message and mandate apply to a broad segment of the welfare caseload, and staff members begin with the expectation that everyone can participate and go to work. At the same time, program policy recognizes that not all will be able to work or participate at all times. If a barrier or problem is identified, staff first looks for ways to help the participant resolve it. Then, if the problem cannot be addressed within the context of the program, options are available for deferral or exemption from participation. Remember, however, that it is important to coordinate such exemptions or deferrals with time limit policies. If recipients are subject to the time limit, excusing them from participation in a work first program may harm them in the long run.

9. Mandates and Sanctions

If certain groups of welfare recipients are required to participate in a work first program, planners need to define precisely what is required and what the penalties are for noncompliance. Sanctions are a tool to bring participants into the program and to motivate them in their job search. Therefore, the success of sanctions is judged not by the number of sanctions ultimately imposed, but by the extent to which those under the mandate *do* participate. Intent-to-sanction

(or warning) notices are sufficient to bring many participants into compliance. Others do not comply even after sanctions are imposed. Sanctioning rates in work first programs that MDRC has studied range from 3 percent (in Florida's Project Independence) to 37 percent (in Grand Rapids, Michigan's, JOBS program) over a one-year follow-up period.[19]

Questions to Address in Designing Mandates and Sanction Policies

- **How flexible will the mandate be?** Within the structure of a broad mandate, it may be useful to build in some flexibility—in either allowable activities or hours of participation—for case managers to design employment plans based on individual situations. Inflexible mandates may lead staff to defer or exempt participants who might be able to participate or work part time. (See section 8 for more on participation requirements.) However, more flexible mandates may make it harder for a state to achieve the federally required participation rates (see Appendix A).

- **How will the mandate be presented to participants?** Some programs discuss sanctions prominently in order to encourage participation. Others try to be upbeat, promoting the opportunities presented by the program rather than threatening sanctions. Those programs that do not emphasize the mandate up front need to make sure safeguards are in place so that participants are not sanctioned without adequate notice.

- **How much effort will be made to bring people into compliance before a sanction is imposed?** Some programs send out intent-to-sanction notices as soon as participants fail to respond to program mandates. Others make repeated efforts to contact participants and learn the reasons for noncompliance. The conciliation process can also vary in length. For example, Utah's welfare-to-work program has a comprehensive conciliation policy, involving both a home visit and case review. Administrators there say that noncompliance is usually the result of participation barriers of which case managers were not aware and that once those barriers are addressed, participants come into compliance.

- **What form will sanctions take?** Sanctions may be a reduction in the family's grant, removal of the noncompliant parent from the grant, or loss of the entire grant. The more severe the sanction, the stronger the message and the incentive to participate. However, severe sanctions also carry greater potential risks for individuals—and their children—who do not participate, for whatever reason. In general, the harsher the sanction,

19. Kemple and Haimson, 1994; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton, Brock, Farrell, Friedlander, and Harknett), forthcoming. In Project Independence, 24 percent of those required to participate were referred for sanctioning. However, most either came into compliance or left welfare before a sanction was imposed.

the more important it is to make clear to participants what is expected of them and the consequences of not meeting those requirements, as well as to provide clear guidelines for conciliation.

- **How can a sanction be cured?** Sanctions can be cured either as soon as the participant comes into compliance or only after a certain period of time, often increasing with consecutive incidents of noncompliance. Mandatory minimum sanctions can send a strong message and save staff from the paperwork that can be involved in repeatedly recalculating grants. However, sanctions that are hard to cure give people little incentive to comply before the end of the sanction period. To avoid the extra paperwork that might ensue if participants dropped in and out, some programs require participants to show good faith (for example, by complying for two weeks) before reinstating their grant retroactive to the date of compliance.

10. Tailoring Work First to the Program's Goals

The program mix you choose will depend partly on the program's goals. Work first programs are generally geared toward the goals of increasing the number of case heads of household who work, reducing welfare rolls, and saving welfare dollars. A work first approach may not be appropriate for programs with very different goals. At the same time, however, programs may have additional or secondary goals that can be accommodated within a work first model. Planners of such programs should think about including activities, options, and related policies that can further those goals. For example, a program with the goal of increasing family income might consider adding to its policy mix increased earnings disregards and more generous child care and other benefits to make work pay, and allowing more opportunity for participants to combine work with education and training that can increase their earnings.

Table 1outlines some of the ways in which the program model and emphasis might vary among programs, depending on their goals. While the basic work first model remains the same, the mix of policies and practices can differ.

11. Understanding the Caseload and Labor Market

Obtaining some basic information about the caseload and the local labor market can help planners get a feel for the environment in which the work first program will operate. In general, it makes sense to try to gather only existing, readily available information rather than to conduct an in-depth study. Some information can be obtained from management information systems, labor agency

Table 1

Program Goals and Related Program Features

Program Goal	Possible Program Features
1. Reduce the number of families on welfare	• Job search geared to full-time employment • Continued participation in program activities until off welfare
2. Increase employment among families on welfare	• Job search geared to either part-time or full-time employment • Support for combining work and welfare
3. Increase the income of families	• Increased earnings disregards, child care assistance, and other benefits to make work pay • Job search and job development geared to higher-paying jobs • More opportunity allowed for education or training that can increase earnings
4. Impose a reciprocal obligation on welfare recipients	• Mandatory participation for a broad portion of the caseload • Swift and strict sanctions for nonparticipation • More use of unpaid work experience and/or subsidized jobs to engage those who are unable to find unsubsidized employment
5. Keep applicants from becoming long-term recipients	• Applicant job search and one-time payments to help applicants avoid coming on welfare • Emphasis on getting people quickly into the program
6. Move long-term recipients into jobs	• More marketing of work and teaching basic work habits • Supervised work experience and job development for those unable to find jobs on their own
7. Reduce recidivism	• Transitional benefits and support services for those who leave welfare • Help with obtaining work-related benefits, such as the Earned Income Credit • Reemployment assistance for those who lose a job
8. Improve the well-being of children	• Help with obtaining high-quality child care • Focus on increasing total family income • Monitoring of child outcomes
9. Achieve short-term savings	• Mostly job search, with few other activities for participants • Close monitoring of participation • Swift and strict sanctions for noncompliance
10. Aim for longer-term cost-effectiveness	• Job search supplemented by other employment-focused activities • More attention to serving long-term recipients • Focus on reducing recidivism

data, and other sources. In addition, planners might consider conducting a baseline survey for a few weeks in order to obtain background information about the characteristics, interests, and perceived barriers of participants. The Metropolitan Tulsa Chamber of Commerce conducted an in-depth labor market analysis when designing IndEx, an employer-driven welfare-to-work program. The analysis included employer and employee surveys, meetings with economic development agencies, federal and state data sources, and regional and local planning data. The Chamber used the analysis to determine what gaps needed to be filled in the labor market and to develop criteria for assessing participants on the basis of the skills needed in the local marketplace.

Below is a list of the kinds of information planners might want to know, followed by some of the reasons the information might be useful in the context of a work first program. Be aware that there is a limit to what this information can tell you. It is difficult to predict how participants will fare in a program on the basis of either demographic characteristics or labor market conditions, and work first programs have been successfully implemented in a variety of environments.

Information About the Caseload

- **Basic caseload demographics, including number of single-parent and two-parent families and number and ages of children.** To understand who will be participating and what their child care needs might be.
- **Extent of work experience.** To get an idea of how easy or difficult it will be for participants to find work and what wages they might earn. Also, to balance the program's focus between, on the one hand, marketing the idea of work and teaching basic work habits (for those with little or no work history) and, on the other hand, emphasizing job retention and advancement strategies (for those with a proven ability to find work).
- **Percentage of caseload with reported earnings.** To know how many people are already working at least part time, and as an indication of how likely it is that participants will mix work and welfare. It is also important to understand how grant levels, financial incentives, and other policies affect the trade-off between welfare and work and the ease or difficulty of combining welfare and work.
- **Percentage who leave welfare due to employment and rates of recidivism for this group.** To provide some insight into how much the program should focus on job search, on helping participants succeed in jobs, and on helping those who lose a job find a new one.
- **Perceived barriers to employment.** To focus the program's message and services on addressing or overcoming those barriers.

- **Race and ethnicity.** To identify issues of race in the labor market that may arise as participants look for jobs or as program staff develop jobs; to identify cultural differences that might change how the program is marketed or how activities are approached; and to identify the need for services in languages other than English.

Information About the Labor Market

- **Trends in state and local income and wage levels, particularly for families at the bottom of the income spectrum.** To help calculate the trade-off between welfare and work, which will affect participants' motivation and the way staff members market the program. If the jobs available are low wage, you may also want to consider financial incentives (see section 38) and other supports to make work pay.
- **Unemployment statistics and other indicators of the economic climate.** To help anticipate how long it will take for participants to find jobs and how many might need additional services after completing job search. In a good economy, more jobs may be available, but welfare recipients are likely to have greater barriers to employment. In contrast, jobs may be scarcer at times of high unemployment, but a greater proportion of those on welfare will have job skills and experience.
- **Needs of local employers.** To help in assessing participants, advising them, and designing useful activities for those who are initially unsuccessful at finding a job.
- **Location of jobs.** If available jobs are not located close to where participants live, you may want to consider strategies for addressing transportation problems so that participants have access to those jobs (see section 7).
- **Gender, racial, and ethnic differences in job opportunities.** Historically, certain occupations have not been open to women or members of particular racial or ethnic groups. You may decide to help participants break into such nontraditional areas of employment. You may also want to teach participants strategies for dealing with discrimination in job search and on the job.
- **Prospects for employment growth by sector.** To help staff members target job search to geographical areas or industries where there are openings and room for growth, and to help job developers determine where they should concentrate their efforts.
- **Longer-term economic prospects.** It is useful to consider the question: How will your strategy fare in a recession? When jobs are scarce, it may be more difficult for a large portion of the caseload to find work. In addition,

more people typically enter the welfare rolls during recessions—including many who may be considered job ready—thereby expanding caseloads and increasing spending on cash assistance (though other factors, such as changes in family structure and program rules, also affect caseload size). This may reduce resources available for work first programs at the same time as the number of potential participants increases.

12. Building Support for the Program

Building support among internal staff, partner agencies, political players, advocates, employers, and the broader community is important to the successful implementation of a work first program. Staff, whether administrative or line, are likely to do a better job if they share the program's vision and goals (see also section 18, on promoting an employment focus). When partner agencies support the program, they are likely to make a greater effort to coordinate services and promote the program's goals (see also section 20, on interagency linkages). Giving local employers a sense of ownership of the program can go a long way toward enhancing job development and placement, especially in small towns and rural areas. Community opposition can affect the program if advocacy groups mount legal and other challenges. In addition, community and political opposition can lead staff to question the future of the program and make them less likely to work to implement it.

Work first programs may cause concern among certain groups. The education and training communities may be concerned if they believe that the only program activity is job search. Advocates and welfare rights groups may fear that the program is going to force participants to take low-wage jobs without benefits or advancement opportunities, or may believe that the program's primary focus is on sanctioning those who do not or cannot comply with the new requirements. Child care providers and child-welfare advocates may be concerned about the availability and quality of child care, especially if the program adopts a broad participation mandate.

In general, it is best to try to involve all parties from the earliest planning stages and to be responsive to their concerns.[20] However, you may not have control over the timing or process of decision making; for example, program specifics may have been handed down by the governor or legislature. In addition, a long planning process may not be desirable if you want to get the program in place quickly. Within the confines of your situation, however, it pays to do what you can to involve in the process those whom you want to be your partners in the work first effort. It is likely that there will be at least some level of policy or implementation over which you have control and in which your

20. Program planners in Vermont went through an extensive process of gathering input and building consensus before implementing their Welfare Restructuring Project. See Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department of Social Welfare, 1992.

partners can play a role. Even if you have no control in shaping the new policies, it is helpful to explain them to all concerned parties and to answer any questions they may have.

Strategies for Building Support

✔ **Give players a stake in the program.** Communicate to staff, partner organizations, and others that they are important to the process and explain how what they do fits in with the work first mission. Giving local offices, partner agencies, and staff flexibility in operating the program can increase support for change and help meet local needs.

✔ **Identify partners.** Identify those individuals and organizations who support the work first proposal, and organize them to help you market the program to others.

✔ **Use a bottom-up approach.** When asking for input, try to create an atmosphere in which ideas are generated from the bottom up. Staff members are more likely to support and become involved in something they helped to create.

✔ **Make use of others' expertise.** The groups you need to work with are knowledgeable in their fields. Take the concerns of service providers and advocates seriously and look for ways to address them. At the same time, be honest about what you have control over and what you do not.

✔ **Hold focus groups.** Focus groups can be a great way both to gather information and to build support. Aim to include people in a variety of roles (program staff, other human services providers, business owners, community leaders, and program participants) so that members learn from one another as well as informing you.

✔ **Examine what has worked in the past and what has not.** Look at the current system and past programs to see which elements worked well and which ones did not. Find ways to incorporate the most successful practices into the new program and focus on how it can improve upon past ones.

✔ **Let people know the result of your work.** Through a written document or by some other means, let people know what input you received from various sources and how it has shaped your program. It is important that people involved in the process feel that their contributions mattered.

✔ **Follow up.** Maintain the relationships you have built during the planning stage, and continue team building internally and with key partners. Keep all players up to date on program activities, and invite suggestions for improving the program in the future. Some ways to do this are to have regular meetings, create a newsletter, form advisory groups, and hold an open house so that key players and members of the community can see the program in practice.

13. Evaluating Program Performance

How will you monitor the implementation of your work first program and measure its success? A variety of mechanisms are available to measure program performance.[21] Outcome and process measures are useful management tools that can focus staff effort and identify weak areas. Formal evaluations can measure program impacts.

The performance measures you choose should reflect and support the program's goals and objectives. (See section 10, on tailoring work first to the program's goals.) Be careful that the measures promote the outcomes you want and do not neglect important areas or inadvertently encourage undesired outcomes. In addition, be aware that different measures—or the same information measured in different ways or at different points—will yield different information. Finally, the data required for some measures may be costly or difficult to collect. In choosing performance measures, bear in mind what information you already have and what your management information system can be modified to do. Make sure that the data can be collected relatively easily and accurately, and that data collection will not be burdensome in terms of cost or staff time. Also, bear in mind any data-gathering requirements mandated at the federal and state levels for other purposes, and try to coordinate them with your own needs.

It is a challenge to develop a performance measurement system that provides meaningful and practical information and that guards against creaming and inflated outcomes. Such a system requires a long-term investment to design, implement, adjust, and maintain. The challenge becomes even greater if the work first program is being operated in coordination with other agencies.

Outcome and Process Measures

- **Job placements.** The traditional outcome measure in a work first program is the number of participants who get jobs. It is also useful to know the length of time individuals participated in the program before finding employment, the point in the program flow at which they gained employment, and their wage levels and number of work hours. Follow up to learn how many are still working after 30 days, 90 days, or longer.

  Be aware, however, that measuring only job placements can result in creaming (if staff focus on the most employable participants) or in inflation of program outcomes (if staff report placements that are unconfirmed or do not last). An overemphasis on placement can also inadvertently encourage staff to neglect, defer, or sanction the hardest-to-serve participants. Measuring participation or coverage (see below), in addition to placements, can help guard against this. You might also want to look at

21. For more on performance measures in welfare employment programs, see Dickinson et al., 1988; Zornitsky and Rubin, 1988; and Barnow, 1992.

the characteristics of those who do not get jobs, to see if additional focus on some groups of participants may be needed.

- **Welfare leaving and returning.** By changing the message and culture of welfare, a work first program can have an effect beyond that captured by measuring job placement. It can therefore be useful to look more broadly at the number of people who leave welfare for work, even though you may not be able to distinguish between those who leave as a result of the program and those who would have found work anyway. It is also important to monitor and measure recidivism, so that you know how many of those who leave return later. If your program includes applicant job search or other up-front diversion policies, you will want to measure the number of applicants diverted from entering the welfare rolls. Again, monitor to see if they are reapplying later.

- **Participation.** Bringing participants into a work first program is an important operational challenge. Participation measures highlight the importance of this challenge and focus the attention of administrators and staff on meeting it. They can also be useful in identifying bottlenecks and other operational problems or weak program areas. However, too strong an emphasis on participation measures can divert the focus from the real goal—employment. Moreover, if the definition of participation is a narrow one, you may understate the number of people who are appropriately involved in the program mandate.

  Because participation measures are ratios, it makes a great deal of difference what is included in the numerator and in the denominator. In establishing the numerator, program planners need to decide what activities and statuses to count as participation. The denominator can be the entire welfare caseload, those who are mandatory for the program, or those who actually enroll. Each of these denominators will show successively higher rates of coverage but will omit certain groups. (Note that federal law specifies the definition of participation for the purpose of meeting federal requirements; see Appendix A.)

- **Coverage.** Coverage is a broad definition of participation that includes all those who are considered to be in an acceptable status. For example, coverage might include those in program activities as well as those who combine work and welfare, even if they are considered exempt from work first. Coverage might also include activities such as counseling or drug treatment where appropriate. Some programs might include sanctioned cases, recognizing that those cases are being appropriately dealt with under program guidelines. Others may choose not to include sanctioned cases in the coverage rate, as a way of encouraging program staff to work harder to bring people into compliance.

By measuring coverage rather than participation, you focus attention on those individuals who are left *unserved* by the program and aim to minimize their number. This protects against creaming by encouraging staff to work with—and giving them credit for working with—everyone.

- **Other measures.** In general, you will want to highlight one or two performance measures that reflect the program's primary goals. However, it is useful to track a variety of other measures that can provide additional clues to program performance. These can furnish information on intermediate outcomes and implementation success. For example, completion rates and length of time in education and training activities can give you an idea of whether those activities have successfully adopted the quick-employment philosophy of work first. Other measures can also reflect how the program is doing at achieving additional or secondary goals. For example, you may want to measure average family income if reducing poverty is a goal. You may also want to consider ways to measure the stability and appropriateness of child care placements. Finally, other measures can provide a more complete picture of your program, to ensure that no unintended consequences have resulted from program policies or other performance measures.

Program Evaluation

Welfare recipients regularly find jobs and leave the rolls even without welfare-to-work programs. Because the caseload is so dynamic—and so sensitive to economic and other factors—it is difficult to judge the success of your program without knowing what would have happened in its absence. Random-assignment evaluations answer that question, by separating the effects of the program from changes that would have occurred anyway. Potential participants are randomly assigned either to the program or to a control group that is not eligible for program services. The characteristics of the two groups are therefore comparable, and both groups face the same labor market and other conditions. Subsequent differences in employment, earnings, or welfare receipt between the two groups can then be confidently attributed to the program.

Table 2 illustrates the difference between outcomes and impacts. As the table shows, program A clearly has the best outcome of the three, with a 70 percent employment rate, but—perhaps because of a strong economy or because participants were highly skilled—most participants would have found jobs even without the program's help. Program C has the smallest outcome but the largest impact; it was the most successful of the three at *increasing* the number of people who found jobs. The table illustrates the point that strong outcomes do not necessarily mean that a program is working well. Random-assignment evaluations can uncover a program's true impact.

Program planners may also wish to conduct internal random assignment for pilot projects to test different approaches before implementing them programwide. For example, if you are unsure whether it is worth allocating resources for applicant job search, you might randomly assign new welfare applicants either to applicant job search or to a regular route into the program. You could then compare welfare approval and employment rates for the two groups to determine whether you want to go ahead with that program component. The same technique could work for post-placement services, job development, and other activities.

Table 2

Outcomes Versus Impacts

Program	Outcome: Employment Rate with the Program	Control: What the Employment Rate Would Have Been Without the Program	Impact: The Difference the Program Made
A	70%	65%	5 percentage points
B	50%	40%	10 percentage points
C	40%	20%	20 percentage points

III.

Implementing Work First: Advice on Program Administration

Once the basic policies of a work first program have been set, it falls to administrators to put the actual program into place. To do that, they need to hire and train staff, determine how staff functions will be assigned, and clearly communicate the program's message to all staff and service providers. In addition, modifications to management information systems will be required to support the work of staff and provide administrators with the information they need to oversee the program. Administrators must also develop linkages with outside service providers who will work with program participants. Finally, administrators need to understand the costs of their program and to identify strategies to reduce costs. Part III of this guide (sections 14-22) discusses the trade-offs inherent in different management approaches, and provides advice for program managers as they tackle these various challenges in the context of work first.

14. Hiring and Training Staff

Hiring Staff

Staffing takes on added importance in work first programs because so much of the job involves encouraging and motivating participants in addition to the work of processing and monitoring participation. Most programs will make use of existing program staff as they shift to a work first approach. Many will also hire new staff. In assembling the program staff, administrators will need to work within local civil service rules, hiring limitations, and union agreements.

The following guidelines have been recommended by administrators in several work first programs. Most apply to staff at every level, from management to support staff.

✔ Look for staff who are committed to the program's philosophy and goals, and who believe the program can work.

✔ Look for staff who are outgoing, energetic, and enthusiastic and who can strike a balance between compassion and challenging participants. Also, look for staff who are supportive of participants and believe in their abilities.

✔ Look for staff who are organized and can manage a caseload without becoming overwhelmed by the administrative part of the job.

✔ Hire a diverse staff, who bring different backgrounds and expertise to the program. These might include:

- Staff from the private sector, because that is where most participants will be looking for jobs
- Staff with an employment or human resources background, who can bring expertise in job placement
- Staff with experience in marketing, public relations, or sales, especially for positions as job developers
- Staff who are experienced at making presentations or working with groups, especially for positions that involve facilitating job clubs or other group activities
- Staff with experience as eligibility workers, to bring an understanding of what the eligibility office does and to facilitate coordination between the two offices
- Staff from the organizations that will provide key services, because they know the culture and "language" of those programs
- Staff with specialized training or a social work background, who can serve as a resource for other staff members in working with hard-to-serve participants

- Former welfare recipients, who bring personal experience to the program and whose success can motivate both staff and participants
- Staff who reflect the diversity—in terms of gender, race, age, language, and the like—of the participants being served

Training Staff

Training for work first staff needs to focus both on the tasks required to do the job and on the program's overall philosophy and goals. At least one day of training should focus exclusively on the philosophy, to make sure that all staff are willing and able to promote that philosophy in their work. This will be less of an issue when new staff are hired who already support the program's goals, and more of an issue when current staff are asked to adapt to a new program philosophy. Program administrators may wish to provide training in the goals and operations of work first not only to their own staff but also to staff of outside service providers and partner agencies. In addition, administrators may wish to provide staff with training about other programs and benefits that might affect participants as they move to work, such as transitional benefits, the Earned Income Credit, and income-based housing subsidies.

It is often difficult to find the time and resources to devote to extensive staff training. Some programs have made use of free local resources—for example, by borrowing space at a community college or finding individuals with relevant expertise from community social service agencies or employment services to conduct training sessions. Training can also be done in stages, beginning with the program message and the most immediate skill needs, then reinforcing the message and adding other skills as the program develops. Remember, too, that you can use other forums besides formal training—such as daily supervision and encouraging diverse staff to learn from each other—to communicate key program messages and teach staff relevant skills.

Other suggestions for training include:

✔ Combine classroom training for new staff with on-the-job training.

✔ Provide regular, ongoing training, identifying training needs by getting suggestions from line staff and supervisors.

✔ Bring staff together regularly, without a formal training agenda, to discuss issues and to share ideas and best practices.

✔ Have managers and supervisors reinforce the main messages from training once staff are back at the office.

✔ Relate training to the program's goals and explain how it will help staff achieve those goals.

- ✔ Use training to bring information back to administrators, including trainees' suggestions for ways to improve the program and make the jobs of staff easier.
- ✔ Provide training on cultural diversity related to the social identities and characteristics of participants.
- ✔ If you do not have in-house expertise on a particular issue, bring in outside trainers (for example, someone from a staffing service to train job developers).
- ✔ Publicize the purpose of training sessions beforehand, so that staff and supervisors can make decisions about who should attend.
- ✔ When possible, schedule training for a variety of days in order to give staff options on when to attend.

15. Caseload Size and Specialization

The case manager is the most visible staff member in most work first programs, and is responsible for overseeing a participant's journey from welfare to work. How your program operates will therefore be shaped largely by the decisions you make about each case manager's caseload size and responsibilities.[22] Some program administrators may choose not to implement a formal case management structure, instead having participants work with whichever staff member is available at a given time. However, most administrators find that maintaining regular caseloads allows staff to develop ongoing relationships with participants and more effectively motivate them, guide them, and monitor their progress.

Caseload Size

Caseloads in work first programs being studied in three sites as part of the JOBS Evaluation ranged from 95 to 120 cases per case manager.[23] In general, smaller caseloads (100 or less) enable staff to provide more individualized support, to monitor participation more stringently, and to follow up more quickly on attendance and other problems.[24] Smaller caseloads also afford more opportunity for case managers to use persuasion instead of relying on penalties to increase participation. In contrast, large caseloads (as high as 200 or more) make

22. For more on the issues discussed in this section and other case management issues, see Doolittle and Riccio, 1992.

23. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton, Brock, Farrell, Friedlander, and Harknett), forthcoming.

24. A direct comparison of different caseload sizes in Riverside, California, found that reducing caseloads from 100 to 50 did not improve program impacts on earnings or welfare receipt. See Riccio, Friedlander, and Freedman, 1994.

it possible to process a much larger share of the eligible total caseload through the intake points of the program. The trade-off is largely between breadth of participation and intensity of services.

How large caseloads can be without negatively affecting services also depends on other factors. For example, staff can manage larger caseloads in programs with strong computer systems, clerical and other supports, and specialized handling of some tasks, such as child care or attendance monitoring. If case managers do not have those supports, or if they do not have clear guidance on how to prioritize their work, they can be overwhelmed even with smaller caseloads. The American Public Welfare Association recommends that welfare-to-work program administrators consider the following questions in determining caseload size:[25]

- What are the characteristics (that is, the degree of job readiness) of the participants with whom case managers work?
- What are the functions that case managers are expected to perform?
- What are the performance goals that case managers must satisfy?
- How much access do case managers have to community services?
- What levels of clerical support and automation are available to case managers?
- What are the background and training of case managers?

Caseload issues are different in work first than in other welfare-to-work programs because program activities are shorter-term and participants are moving more quickly into employment. Caseload sizes may need to be smaller, as case managers work more intensively with their entire caseload, closely monitoring the participation even of those referred to outside activities. At the same time, the program may be able to serve more participants over time, because of rapid turnover.

Specialization

Different programs define the case manager's job in different ways. In some programs, case managers are responsible for each step along the participant's path to employment, from orientation to job placement. In others, some tasks—such as assessment or job development—are handled by specialized staff. Similarly, programs may assign caseloads randomly across case managers, or may instead assign cases to specialized case managers on the basis of participants' characteristics or activities. The pros and cons of both types of specialization are outlined below. If you choose to specialize staff functions, you may want to

25. Institute for Family Self-Sufficiency, 1994.

consider adopting a team approach, in which staff with different specialties work together to serve program participants.

- **Specialization by program function.** Designating certain program elements as the responsibility of specialized staff members can allow staff to focus their attention and develop expertise. If case managers not only have to counsel and monitor participants but also must conduct assessments, facilitate job clubs, and call employers to develop jobs, it can be difficult to give each of these aspects the attention it needs. Different functions also require different skills, and specialization can take advantage of staff with those skills. (Some program elements might also be contracted out to specialized service providers.) Finally, specialization can free case managers of administrative responsibilities so that they can focus on employment. For example, specialized staff might handle scheduling orientations, monitoring attendance, or processing child care payments.

  Generalist case managers, in contrast, may develop stronger relationships with participants, and can use information they learn in one role to promote employment through another (for example, using knowledge of a participant's interests and needs when developing job leads). A structure in which case managers are responsible for more pieces of the program can also avoid communication problems between staff and establish a clear locus of responsibility for moving participants into employment.

- **Specialization by participant characteristics and activities.** Another option is to assign certain groups of participants to specialized case managers. This type of specialization can provide non-English-speaking participants with a case manager who speaks their language or can ensure that teen parents get special attention. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, staff caseloads are coordinated with participants' assignments to different service providers. Specialized staff get to know the service providers, thus facilitating communication and coordination.

  A drawback of specialized case management is that caseloads may shift whenever participants' characteristics change, as when a participant completes an education program. Every time this occurs, you risk losing participation and delaying progress toward employment. Separating out participants can also send mixed messages about work expectations by suggesting that some people need special services. Finally, specialized caseloads can be difficult for administrators and supervisors to manage, because they may require different degrees of personalized attention, variations in caseload size, different types of supervision, and different performance standards.

16. The Role of the Eligibility Office

The eligibility (or income maintenance) office is a crucial player in welfare-to-work programs. This section describes the role of eligibility staff in a work first program and offers suggestions for improving communication and coordination between the two offices. Section 17 discusses some of the trade-offs involved in co-locating eligibility and work first or integrating responsibility for both functions in a single staff member.

Functions of Eligibility Staff

The roles that eligibility staff often play in work first, and ways in which some programs have tried to facilitate those roles, can be summarized as follows:

- **Communicating the program's message.** Eligibility staff often give participants their first explanation of what the program is about and what to expect. In order to do this effectively, eligibility staff must understand the program's philosophy and requirements, must be able to effectively communicate these to participants, and must have the time to add this employment focus to their jobs. As the message spreads, and as more participants get jobs, this function should become easier and the dynamics of the welfare office may begin to change. It also helps for eligibility staff to have visited the work first office and seen at first hand what the program is about.

  Eligibility staff have a special role in explaining financial incentives, earned income disregards, and other rules about what happens to a participant's grant when she goes to work. Eligibility staff often understand this better than work first staff, and thus can be a more knowledgeable source of information for participants. They can also be more credible when it comes to convincing participants that work can pay.

- **Screening and making referrals.** Eligibility staff are generally responsible for identifying mandatory participants and for referring new mandatory and voluntary participants to work first. Eligibility staff also need to promptly refer individuals who become mandatory when exemptions end, when sanctions are lifted, or for other reasons. For both mandatory participants and potential volunteers, eligibility staff need to market the program and encourage participation. However, making referrals to work first may not be a high priority for eligibility staff, and delays in this area are a common complaint of welfare-to-work program administrators. It helps to include this function in the formal job description of eligibility workers and to monitor and reward its completion. Another solution is for the work first office to place a staff person at the eligibility office to assist in referrals.

- **Offering employment assistance.** Many eligibility staff welcome the opportunity to help individuals move from welfare to work. Eligibility staff can be especially useful in this role when working with individuals who are not participating in the work first program, either because they are not in a target group or have not yet been referred. Administrators can support and encourage this role by freeing up staff time and by providing resources and information about job search, job leads, and available support services—especially child care. Recognition or other performance incentives can set the tone and reward eligibility workers who are especially successful at helping individuals find jobs. Changing the atmosphere of the eligibility office—for example, by hanging employment-themed posters and providing information about employment opportunities—can also help.

- **Sanctioning noncompliant participants.** Processing sanctions that result from noncompliance with work first involves two-way communication. Work first staff must notify eligibility staff to impose a sanction, and eligibility staff must act on the request. The process works the same way when a sanction has been cured. It is often unclear which staff is responsible for following up on people in sanction status and for attempting to bring them into compliance, and each worker may have information about a given case that the other lacks. Delays or miscommunication in implementing sanctions can be costly and send mixed messages to participants, while similar problems in reinstating benefits can cause financial hardship for participants. Some work first programs have taken on the sanctioning function to avoid miscommunication or delays.

- **Processing changes in participants' employment and earnings.** Work first staff need to notify eligibility workers when a participant gets a job, and eligibility workers need to keep case managers apprised of changes in employment and reported income. Program managers in one site report that their largest financial losses come from delays in adjusting grants when participants start work. Likewise, case managers often report that participants lose income because eligibility workers fail to apply all of the earned income disregards for which participants are eligible.

  Participants who combine welfare and work often take much more of an eligibility worker's time than do those without earned income. To accommodate this additional workload, program administrators might consider reducing the caseloads of staff with earned income cases (for example, by counting two employed participants as three without earned income in determining caseload size). Work first staff can help by providing eligibility workers with much of the detailed employment data they need for adjusting grant levels. Timely and accurate reporting of earned income can also be facilitated by conducting individual meetings or

group orientations with newly employed participants, to review changes in their grants and to explain reporting requirements.

Suggestions for Improving Coordination

The following suggestions offer additional ways to improve communication and coordination between eligibility and work first offices:

- ✔ Include a discussion of common goals, coordination issues, and communication procedures in the training of new and ongoing staff.
- ✔ Create liaisons in each office.
- ✔ Put in place a team approach by pairing eligibility workers with work first case managers so that their caseloads overlap.
- ✔ Have staff visit each other's offices and learn about their operations and procedures.
- ✔ Hold joint staff meetings to discuss coordination issues.
- ✔ Ensure that eligibility workers know at least one work first case manager whom they can call for information, and vice versa.
- ✔ Make it easy for staff to know who a client's eligibility worker or case manager is—for example, by assigning caseloads alphabetically.

17. Co-location and Integrated Case Management

One way to facilitate coordination between eligibility and work first is to co-locate those services. Another way is to combine eligibility and work first functions through integrated case management. This section discusses the trade-offs involved in each of these approaches.

Co-location

The benefits of co-locating eligibility and work first offices can be summarized as follows:

- **Communication.** Co-location can facilitate communication and coordination between eligibility and work first staffs.
- **The "culture" of welfare.** Co-location can help to change the overall atmosphere of the welfare office to one focused on work and can increase eligibility workers' "buy-in" to the program.
- **Convenience.** Co-location can be easier on participants, especially those with transportation problems, and can reduce delays in participation.

Co-location also has potential drawbacks. In deciding whether to co-locate eligibility and work first, consider the following:

- **Message.** Locating work first in a separate office can emphasize that the program is not "business as usual," thus helping to establish a distinct program message.
- **Atmosphere.** Many work first programs try to maintain professional offices modeled on the private sector to complement their emphasis on employment. Welfare offices—particularly in urban areas—may be crowded or noisy, have people constantly coming and going, or have guards and other security features.
- **Space needs.** If the program includes job clubs and other activities on-site, facilities that can accommodate both offices may not be available.
- **Participants' attitudes.** Because attitude and motivation are such key elements of work first, it might make sense to keep the offices separate if participants have negative associations with the eligibility office.

Integrated Case Management

Another decision involves whether to maintain separate staff for the eligibility functions of the welfare system or to combine the eligibility and work first functions. A "traditional" approach to case management separates the functions of the work first case manager from those of the eligibility worker. An "integrated" approach combines these functions in a single worker.

An ongoing evaluation of the JOBS program in Columbus, Ohio,[26] which includes a direct comparison of these two approaches, suggests that integrated case management may lead to:

- **Significantly higher welfare savings and reductions in welfare rolls**
- **A higher proportion of participants attending the work first orientation sessions**
- **Higher monthly participation rates**
- **Lower monthly sanctioning rates**
- **Better tracking and monitoring of participants**

The integrated approach may have been more successful for several reasons. First, an integrated model avoids any lapse of communication between the two workers and ensures a consistent message. Second, participants may take the program requirements more seriously when they know that their case manager also controls their grant. Finally, the integrated approach may help forge a closer relationship between workers and clients, encouraging participation.

26. See Weissman and Hamilton, 1996; and Harknett, 1996.

Despite these promising results, administrators should be cautious when considering integrating work first case management and eligibility functions. The employment focus so central to work first can easily get overshadowed by the demands of verifying eligibility, processing grants, and minimizing error rates. Potential problems include the following:

- **Workload.** Eligibility staff often carry heavy caseloads, so their ability to add a focus on employment is limited. An integrated approach necessitates lighter caseloads.
- **Multiple priorities.** The diverse responsibilities of integrated workers also make it more difficult to make employment a priority. Even with caseloads of under 100, issues of eligibility and benefits tend to dominate integrated workers' time, and the employment focus can get lost.
- **Resistance to change.** In some places, it may be easier to create a separate employment-focused program than to reorient the existing welfare bureaucracy.
- **Relationships with clients.** Eligibility staff often function as the "police" of the welfare system, verifying eligibility and protecting against fraud. This may make it difficult for staff and participants to establish the kind of trust required in work first.
- **Staff qualifications.** Eligibility staff are often successful because of their ability to process and manage vast amounts of paperwork. They may not have the motivational, counseling, and other skills that make for a successful work first case manager. Similarly, case managers may not have the skills that make for a successful eligibility worker.

Because of the challenges for staff of taking on so many roles, integrated case management must be implemented in the context of adequate resources: highly trained staff; clerical, computer, and other supports; and high-quality program services.

18. Promoting an Employment Focus

Because work first programs are defined as much by their philosophy as by the services they offer, the clear articulation of the employment message to staff, service providers, and participants is a crucial part of program implementation. Program administrators need to find ways to emphasize the importance of employment and to focus staff on getting people jobs. In addition, unless all those who interact with participants communicate the same message, participants may not understand what is expected of them. This section offers a number of suggestions for promoting an employment focus in your program, and discusses the benefits and risks of establishing performance standards for staff.

Suggestions for Promoting an Employment Focus

✔ **Emphasize employment repeatedly, and from the top down.** It should be clear that support for the new focus comes from a high level, whether that is the governor, the welfare commissioner, or the county administrator. Senior administrators should set the tone by promoting the importance of the program's mission. All levels of management and supervisory staff should follow suit, sending a consistent message down the line. Similarly, the employment message should be reinforced in all interactions with participants as well as in any written materials or notices that participants receive.

✔ **Link the focus on employment to the daily work of staff.** Let staff members see how their daily work promotes the goal of employment, and help them relate what they do to the message given to participants. Shorter-term or activity-specific objectives (such as bringing participants into orientation or increasing education completion rates) should also be related to the larger goal of employment.

✔ **Use a new language.** A change in the program message can be signaled by a change in the language used by program administrators and staff. Including the word "employment" or "work" in the program's name—and repeating it frequently in the context of program activities—can be a powerful way of sending a new message to both staff and participants. Terms like "outcomes," "job placements," and "job contacts" are other examples of a new language for work first.

✔ **Adopt a motto.** Slogans can help clarify the employment message and can make it stand out. For example, Los Angeles adopted the motto "A job, a better job, a career" when it shifted from a program of education and job search to one with a strong emphasis on work first. The motto is part of the program logo and can be seen on posters, in handouts, and on pins worn by staff and administrators. It makes clear that the immediate goal for participants is employment, and conveys the philosophy that even a minimum-wage job is a positive start.

✔ **Make sure that the message is heard and understood.** In Vermont, all Department of Social Welfare staff showed that they understood the new philosophy by signing a poster proclaiming the program message. For participants, signing an employability plan or other "contract" is a concrete way to show that they understand what is expected of them in the new program.

✔ **Market the program.** Promoting the program and its goals through the media and other means can reinforce the employment focus, foster a positive public image of the program, and make staff and participants feel proud

to be a part of it. Marketing the program can also help sell the message to prospective employers and the public.

- ✔ **Promote the employment focus in agreements with service providers.** It is important to communicate the program message not just to your own agency's staff but also to any other providers who will work with program participants. (See section 20 for suggestions on how to do this.)

- ✔ **Monitor outcomes.** Some program administrators either may not want to institute formal performance standards (discussed below) or may be limited in their ability to do so by union contracts or other factors. Even without formalized standards, however, employment and other related outcomes can be monitored and included informally in staff evaluations, and benchmarks can be set for desired outcomes.

- ✔ **Give staff flexibility in achieving desired outcomes.** As you emphasize the goal of employment, give local offices and staff members flexibility to try different approaches to achieve that goal. Staff may better respond to the new focus when they feel that they are given the freedom to carry it out.

- ✔ **Reward success.** Publicly acknowledge the success of individual staff members, units, and offices in meeting program goals. In addition, honor the accomplishments of partner agencies and service providers. High performance can be rewarded with public recognition, certificates of achievement, or prizes, such as gift certificates or movie passes.

- ✔ **Change the culture of the office.** Posters, signs, and videos in the waiting area can all "advertise" the message and heighten the emphasis on employment for the program as a whole. Having pots of coffee available in the waiting area can create an atmosphere of professionalism and respect. Staff should follow the same rules relating to professionalism, punctuality, and "dressing for success" that are recommended for participants.

Performance Standards

How staff are evaluated sends a strong message about the program's goals, and instituting employment-focused performance standards can clearly communicate the program's expectations for staff. One program that has made extensive use of employment standards is in Riverside County, California. Each staff member must achieve at least 15 job placements per month (out of a caseload of approximately 120) in order to meet the standard. In addition, each district office sets performance *goals*, which are higher than the standards (the current goals range from 20 to 30 participants entering employment each month). Staff members who achieve 30 placements in a given month receive an award. Staff

achievements are posted daily, by individual and by unit. The performance of different offices is also publicized, so that they compete against each other.[27]

Administrators in Riverside credit their performance standards for much of the program's success in increasing employment among participants. While staff have multiple job responsibilities, the prominence of the standards makes it clear that employment is the main goal of the program and the main (though not the only) criterion for evaluating staff. Staff with lower performance regularly seek out higher performers to learn "how they do it."

There is no fixed rule for how high to set performance standards. Most programs start with a somewhat arbitrary guess and then adjust the standards according to how well staff do in meeting them.

Despite their potential for heightening a program's employment focus, performance standards present some risks, as discussed below:

- **Performance standards can lead to "creaming."** Because they are evaluated so heavily on the basis of the end goal of employment, staff may concentrate on participants who are most likely to succeed. There may be little incentive for staff to expend a lot of effort working with participants who seem a long way from employment (though administrators in Riverside believe that their program's high performance standards force staff to work with their entire caseload). Combining performance standards with some process standards (such as caseload coverage, described in section 13) can discourage creaming.
- **An overemphasis on employment can detract from individual client needs and from other program goals.** Recognizing incremental steps toward employment or combining employment standards with other performance measures (such as completion of education) can help counteract this.
- **If not monitored, performance standards can lead to inflated outcomes.** In an effort to achieve high outcomes, staff may report employment that is not confirmed or does not last.
- **Performance standards can have a negative effect on staff morale.** This is especially likely if the standards are perceived as unrealistic or unfair. Involving staff in setting the standards can help make them more realistic and counter staff resistance.
- **Putting staff in competition with one another can discourage cooperation.** Measuring the performance of larger units rather than of individual workers or giving credit to all staff who help a participant gain employment can encourage staff to work together.

27. For more on Riverside's approach, see County of Riverside GAIN Program, 1994.

19. Management Information Systems

A successful management information system (MIS) works as both a management tool and a support for line workers. The design and implementation of an MIS should keep both of these uses in mind. In addition, an MIS should support and promote the program's goals. In the context of work first, this may mean an increased emphasis on monitoring and tracking participants, as well as a greater role in simplifying and reducing paperwork so that staff can focus on promoting employment. If the system cannot provide all the support the program needs, administrators should look both for ways to accomplish functions manually and for opportunities to modify the program design so that those functions are not as critical.

Designing an MIS

The following are three key areas which should be addressed in designing an MIS:

- **Who should be served?** The MIS must be able to identify individuals appropriate for participation and make that information available to line staff and managers. A system that tracks who should be called in for participation, who has not participated as required, and who is no longer required to participate can assist line staff in everyday tasks and provide tools for management to assess workloads.
- **What services are being provided?** Line staff should be able to record activities, and managers should be able to see aggregate statistics on participation, both overall and in various components. It is also helpful if staff can identify specific service providers' locations, schedules, and slot openings.
- **Where are participants in the process?** Being able to see where participants are in the array of activities and when activities are scheduled to end helps workers manage their caseloads. It also helps administrators check whether bottlenecks are developing and whether participants are more likely to drop out at certain points in the program. In a time-limited program, a key MIS function is tracking where people are in relation to the time limit. This can be especially complicated if different participants face different time limits or if the time-limit clock can start and stop as the status of participants changes.

A good MIS should be user-friendly and give staff all the tools they need to manage their caseloads. Staff at several work first programs offered the following specific suggestions about what they would like a computerized system to do:

- ✔ Track dates and deadlines, to alert staff when activities or deferrals end, when notices need to be sent, and when meetings need to be scheduled
- ✔ Automatically generate scheduled notices for participants around program activities and other deadlines
- ✔ Automatically schedule participants for meetings, orientations, job clubs, and other activities
- ✔ Coordinate scheduling with other staff—for example, by maintaining uniform class size in scheduling participants for the next available job club
- ✔ Facilitate coordination with eligibility staff, by allowing workers in each office to view information from the other's system and to transmit information over the computer
- ✔ Automatically update information on employment and earnings, as well as basic information like address changes, in the work first system when changes are entered in the eligibility system, and vice versa
- ✔ Automatically insert case information onto computerized forms to avoid double entry and save staff time
- ✔ Help staff quickly calculate for participants what will happen to their grants and total income if they go to work at various wage levels and work hours

A good system should also provide program administrators with reliable data that they can use in their daily management as well as in planning and measuring program performance. Administrators have suggested that in addition to basic program and caseload data, they would like a computerized system to give them easy access to the following information: average wages and hours for participants who start work; the program activities from which participants find jobs; information on job retention and recidivism; profiles of caseloads and placement information for each worker; and information on the number of deferrals and reasons for deferrals.

Finally, a good MIS can help both staff and participants by providing linkages with other agencies or systems that have helpful information. These might include labor department job banks, child care resource and referral agencies, or local community colleges and school systems.

MIS Implementation Issues

In deciding how best to implement an MIS, program managers need to consider the following elements:

- **Resources.** What system resources are already in place? Can the existing systems be easily modified to add new features? If not, is it feasible to

develop a separate system for the new features? Are money and personnel available to develop the system within the desired time? If an automated system cannot be developed or cannot perform all needed functions, a manual system will be needed in its place.

- **Staff support.** Successful implementation of any system requires acceptance from those who must use it. Staff need to be trained both in using the system and in integrating it into their daily work. In addition, equipment must be easily accessible (ideally, there should be a terminal on each worker's desk), and system support must be available to answer questions as they arise.

- **Timing.** The timing of program implementation often determines what system changes can be implemented. It takes time to redesign systems, put them in place, and train staff to use them. A system will be most useful if it is fully operational before program implementation begins. If this is not possible, it is important to prioritize the order in which systems functions will become operational and to put in place manual processes to fill the gaps.

Designing a system is not the end, however. Once a system is developed, programs need to devote resources to maintaining and updating the system, training and retraining staff, and solving problems. If not—if technical staff are no longer available to deal with problems or implement improvements—the system may quickly become outdated and lose its usefulness.

20. Interagency Linkages

Chances are that your agency will not provide all program services itself. Some services will be contracted out, while others may be performed by outside agencies without formal contracts. A variety of factors—such as political pressure for privatization, restrictions on government hiring, or a desire to take advantage of the specialized experience of other agencies—may lead program administrators to look outside the welfare department for certain tasks.

You may want to think about contracting out those elements that the program has not done before or has not done successfully. In addition, you may want to contract out more services in the early stages of a program, focusing internally on core functions at first and then taking on more roles over time. When considering new or modified interagency linkages, program administrators should be prepared to encounter opposition from unions or others. Such opposition can divert the attention of administrators and can delay the implementation of work first. Administrators need to assess the extent of potential opposition and determine whether the effort is worthwhile.

The late Sar Levitan, the labor economist, once defined coordination in employment and training programs as "an unnatural act between two or more nonconsenting bureaucracies." The key organizational players in welfare-to-work programs—typically the department of social services and providers of employment, education, and training—traditionally have different missions, goals, targeting strategies, and accountability standards, and use different kinds of information systems.

Forming successful interagency linkages is particularly important in a work first program, for several reasons: the need for a consistent and clear message to participants; the need for close monitoring of participants; and the need to facilitate quick movement of participants into and between activities and into employment. This section contains advice for forming linkages with partner agencies and for putting in place successful contracts in the context of work first.

Forming Successful Linkages

Shifting to work first is likely to involve a process of reappraisal leading to the restructuring of existing linkages and the establishment of new ones. Here are a few things to consider in that process:

✔ **Know your partners: successful linkages are more than good operating procedures.** A mutual assessment process—before detailed planning begins—can allow organizations to establish common ground about goals and priorities, anticipate conflicts, and set realistic expectations. This assessment process is likely to work best if it involves staff at all levels of the organization. Remember, too, that it takes time for relationships to develop; establish mechanisms for frequent communication and resolution of problems that arise along the way.

✔ **Do not assume that partner organizations cannot change.** Because establishing new relationships can be very difficult, it pays to explore how much current relationships can be altered beyond their traditional roles. Both Portland, Oregon, and Los Angeles, for example, have been successful in getting education institutions that previously focused on long-term human capital development to shift relatively quickly to playing a role in a work first model.

✔ **Sometimes it pays to do it yourself.** It may make sense for your program to take on responsibility for some functions rather than try to coordinate across agencies. For example, many work first programs prefer to run their own job clubs so that they can maintain control over the activity's content and can more readily monitor attendance and progress.

✔ **Be careful about imposing workload and resource burdens.** If you are asking for a service from another organization, you should expect to pay for it.

If you cannot, then you should try to minimize the workload or propose alternatives. For example, it may be overwhelming for a small training provider to report attendance information to many different case managers in a large program. Some programs have responded by designating a single staff member as the reporting contact.

Contracting Out

In establishing formal contracts with service providers, program administrators should bear in mind the following advice:[28]

✔ **Address program philosophy head-on**. Service providers may have goals, perspectives, and philosophies that are different from those of work first. Requests for proposals, contracts, performance measures, and payment structures should be designed so as to directly address the work first program's philosophy and how it will be incorporated into the specific services being contracted. Regular monitoring should ensure that the philosophy has in fact been put into practice.

✔ **Establish communication linkages**. Communication and monitoring procedures and standards should be clearly addressed in agreements with service providers (see also section 33, on maximizing participation). Mechanisms should also be established to promote ongoing teamwork between line staff at the work first office and contracted agencies. Regular visits to each other's sites as well as interagency meetings, retreats, or conferences are useful communication and team-building tools.

✔ **Carefully estimate participation levels**. Developing reasonably accurate projections of the number of individuals who will be served in each program component is critical to negotiating workable agreements with service providers. Such projections enable providers to plan for staffing and participant flow, to predict costs, and to design a payment structure. The projections should take into account both the experiences of similar programs and local caseload characteristics.

✔ **Leave room for flexibility and contingency plans**. The program will inevitably not go precisely as expected. Agreements should therefore be flexible and include contingency plans to allow adjustments to be made once program implementation has begun.

✔ **Consider your contracting options.** Contracts can be structured in a variety of ways. Service providers can be reimbursed for their costs in working with participants or paid for achieving desired outcomes (such as education completion or job placement). Another option is to contract with multiple providers, allowing participants and staff to choose among them.

28. Some of these suggestions are taken from Riccio and Sherwood, 1990.

This can provide leeway for matching participants with programs on the basis of their strengths, location, or special features. It can also improve outcomes by fostering competition among providers.

✔ **Promote the outcomes you want to encourage.** Contracts for work first activities or services should promote outcomes that further the program's goals. The outcomes you emphasize for job club might be placements and retention, while outcomes for skills training might include both credentials attained and job placements. The outcomes should be relevant to the service provided, and should be easily measurable.

✔ **Protect against creaming.** One danger of emphasizing outcomes is that it might lead providers to target only those participants most likely to succeed, especially when funding is at stake. Contracts should give the work first program control over who gets referred to contracted agencies and should specify the reasons why a participant might be denied service or dropped from the activity. Specifying service expectations—in addition to outcome goals—can also guard against creaming.

✔ **Maintain an oversight and coordination role.** Once the contract has been signed, the welfare department's role does not end. The department should maintain a role in oversight and coordination of services.

21. Program Costs

Operating a work first program typically costs less per participant than operating a program that emphasizes education and training, mainly because participants remain in program activities for less time. However, work first programs can vary greatly in their costs, for a number of reasons. These include differences in the average length of participation, the extent of monitoring and case management, which services are emphasized, and the extent to which support services are made available.

To illustrate the range of work first program costs and some of the reasons for the variation, this section looks at the costs of six programs that MDRC has evaluated: Florida's Project Independence; San Diego SWIM (Saturation Work Initiative Model); Riverside, California's, GAIN program; and JOBS programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids (Michigan), and Riverside.

Table 3 breaks down program-related costs into operating costs—staff, administration, and other overhead—and support service costs—mostly for child care and transportation (see section 7 for more on support services). Operating costs are further broken down into costs to the welfare department and costs borne by other agencies, including Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) agencies and education providers. On the one hand, program administrators will aim to maximize the amount of resources leveraged from other sources. On the other

hand, administrators should be aware of the larger picture: maximizing cost-effectiveness from a total government and taxpayer perspective involves taking a certain amount of responsibility for *all* program-related costs.

The following is a discussion of some of the reasons for the variation in costs among the programs cited in Table 3:

- **Operating costs.** Project Independence had the lowest total operating cost per program group member. As economic and other conditions in Florida changed, caseloads increased dramatically. At the same time, the program experienced a hiring freeze and child care budget cuts. Facing those constraints, the program spent less on each participant. Grand Rapids' higher operating costs can be explained primarily by a high level of participation in education and training programs, in part due to an extensive network of education and training services offered in the Grand

Table 3

Estimated Costs for Single Parents Assigned to a Work First Program[a]

Program	Operating Cost Per Person			Support Service Cost Per Person	Total Cost Per Person
	Welfare Dept.	Other Agencies	Total	Welfare Dept. Cost Only	
Florida's Project Independence	$ 312	$ 491	$ 803	$118	$ 921
San Diego SWIM[b]	988	858	1,846	101	1,947
Riverside GAIN[c]	1,671	817	2,488	123	2,611
Atlanta JOBS	1,154	802	1,956	882	2,838
Grand Rapids JOBS	648	2,164	2,812	297	3,109
Riverside JOBS	919	187	1,105	122	1,227
Average	949	886	1,835	274	2,109

SOURCES: Kemple, Friedlander, and Fellerath, 1995; Hamilton and Friedlander, 1989; Riccio, Friedlander, and Freedman, 1994; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton, Brock, Farrell, Friedlander, and Harknett), forthcoming.

(a) Costs are for single-parent AFDC recipients for a two- to three-year follow-up period and are in 1993 dollars. The costs are averages across all program group members, including both those who did and those who did not participate in program activities. (Control group members are not included.) Roughly 60 percent of program group members ever participated in a program activity. Also not included are the costs of services that program group members received after leaving the work first program.

(b) These figures have been inflation-adjusted and therefore differ from those in the cited report. SWIM operating costs include the cost of some community college and training services that participants received after leaving the SWIM program.

(c) These figures are based on two to three years of follow-up, rather than the five years of follow-up in the cited report.

Rapids community. Many individuals were already participating in education or training when they entered Grand Rapids' work first program, and they were allowed to continue in those activities.

- **Support service costs.** Support service costs were lowest in SWIM. Support service costs in most programs are primarily for child care, and SWIM's program group was composed mostly of parents with children six and older, who did not require levels of child care services as high as those needed at the other sites. Also, SWIM's allowable child care rates during the first year of the program were very low ($1.25 per hour per child). Atlanta's support service costs were much higher than the other programs' costs due to high monthly child care costs, a high number of monthly child care payments, and generous payments made for transportation and other ancillary services.

Costs for Program Activities

Table 4 presents the per-person cost of each major work first program activity for those who participated in that activity. The table is based on data from the work first programs in Florida, Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside (both GAIN and JOBS). The component costs given in the table include the costs of the activity or service as well as costs for case management to monitor and enforce participation requirements and address barriers to participation. These costs can give you a start in estimating what your own program costs might be, depending on how many people you expect to participate in each component, how long you expect them to participate, and other factors.[29] The range of costs reflects differences across the five programs studied; the third column of the table explains those differences by noting some of the factors that affected the cost of each component.

Cost-Effectiveness

Welfare-to-work programs do cost the government money, but they can also bring a return on the investment when program participants leave welfare for work. Virtually every program evaluated by MDRC in which job search has been the first component for most participants has been found to be cost-effective from the standpoint of government budgets. The savings from reduced welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid, as well as increased revenue from taxes paid by participants, more than paid for the program. Moreover, close to half of these programs have proven to be very good investments for taxpayers. Within five years, programs in San Diego, Arkansas, and Riverside returned to government between $2.34 and $5.50 per dollar spent.[30]

29. For a discussion of the trade-offs and relative effectiveness of high-cost versus low-cost services, see Friedlander and Gueron, 1992.

30. Hamilton and Friedlander, 1989; Friedlander, Hoerz, Quint, and Riccio, 1985; Riccio, Friedlander, and Freedman, 1994.

Table 4

Cost Per Single-Parent Participant for Work First Program Components: The Range of Costs for Five Programs[a]

Component	Cost Per Participant (Range)	Factors That Affected Costs
Orientation[b]	$25-$100	• Length of orientation; group size
Job search	$270-$1,930	• Duration of job search; staffing and group size
Basic education	$1,610-$4,365	• Duration of education; class size; providers used
Vocational training and college	$4,395-$6,980	• Duration of education or training; class size; providers used
Work experience or on-the-job training[c]	$340-$1,400	• Duration of activity; intensity of supervision
Child care[d]	$435-$2,250	• Length of participation; type of care; age of children; local market rates
Transportation[e]	$65-$125	• Type of transportation; extent of coverage
Other support services[e]	$105-$115	• What is covered (e.g., uniforms, books, equipment, registration and licensing fees)

SOURCES: Kemple, Friedlander, and Fellerath, 1995; Hamilton and Friedlander, 1989; Riccio, Friedlander, and Freedman, 1994; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton, Brock, Farrell, Friedlander, and Harknett), forthcoming.

(a) Costs are two- to three-year costs for single-parent AFDC recipients and are in 1993 dollars. Note that this table uses a different base than does Table 3. Table 3 presents the cost per program group member, including both those who did and those who did not participate in program activities. Table 4, in contrast, presents the cost for each person who actually participated in the program activity cited. As noted below, costs of some components for some sites are not included; this is because of small sample sizes or because comparable estimates were not available.

(b) Not including Riverside GAIN.

(c) Not including Riverside JOBS. Another study in seven sites found a similar range of per-participant costs for unpaid work experience that generally lasted three to six months. On the basis of that study, MDRC estimated that it would cost between $2,000 and $4,000 annually (excluding child care costs) to keep a work experience position filled for a year. See Brock, Butler, and Long, 1993.

(d) Not including Florida.

(e) Not including Florida or Grand Rapids.

22. Strategies to Reduce Costs

The differences in program costs among the work first programs discussed in section 21 reflect differences in program funding, policy, and implementation; the availability of community services; regional wages and prices; labor market conditions; and the demographic characteristics of participants. Some of these variables are outside the control of program planners. However, given these environmental factors, planners can reduce the amount spent on each participant through the decisions they make regarding program policy and implementation. Research suggests some ways to do so, outlined below.

Remember, however, that there are trade-offs to cost-saving strategies, and program administrators need to strike a balance among costs, benefits, goals, and outcomes.[31] Minimal government investment in the short run does not necessarily save government money in the long run. Conversely, well-managed programs with considerable up-front investments can be cost-effective.

Reducing the Length of Time Spent in the Program

✔ **Close monitoring of participation.** By keeping close track of attendance and progress, case managers can ensure that program resources pay for active participation and can reduce the number of months that participants spend in the program. Caseload sizes need to be small enough to allow for close monitoring, or else specialized staff need to be assigned responsibility for monitoring participation (see section 15 for more on caseload size and specialization). Close monitoring also involves coordination with service providers if program activities take place off-site (see section 20, on interagency linkages).

✔ **Short-term activities.** Use of short-term activities, such as job search, reduces the amount of time participants spend in the program. Priority can also be given to short-term programs in other areas, such as education and training, where programs can vary greatly in length.

✔ **Payment agreements.** In order to encourage service providers to reduce the length of time participants stay in activities, targets for completion of activities can be written into contracts and funding agreements. For example, Riverside County makes incentive payments to schools that succeed in getting participants to make progress and complete their education assignments.

31. For more on this issue, see Friedlander and Gueron, 1992.

Reducing Unit Operating Costs[32]

✔ **Economies of scale.** Programs that enroll large numbers of participants benefit from economies of scale. Overhead costs, such as rent, utilities, equipment, and administrative staff salaries, are spread across a larger base of participants.

✔ **Referrals to outside agencies.** Outside agencies (such as adult schools, community colleges, vocational training institutes, and trade schools) may provide and pay for some services utilized by work first participants. The welfare department can reduce its own costs (though not necessarily government costs, since other agencies' costs may increase) by referring participants to these agencies.

✔ **Contracts with outside agencies.** Outside agencies that specialize in particular areas or that serve large numbers of participants may be able to offer some program services more cheaply than can welfare departments. Program administrators can take advantage of this by contracting out those program elements. However, the offsetting costs of contract management and oversight must also be considered.

Reducing Child Care Costs

✔ **Type of child care.** Child care provided by licensed centers tends to be most expensive, followed by family day care and then by child care provided by friends or relatives. Some programs counsel participants to seek low-cost child care, taking the position that welfare recipients who are using low-cost care will be able to afford this service on their own after leaving welfare. Other programs counsel participants to use licensed child care centers, believing that such facilities offer higher quality and more reliable care, and can therefore provide better support for program participation and employment. (See section 7 for suggestions on designing child care support services.)

✔ **Age of children.** Infant child care tends to be most expensive, followed by toddler care and care for preschool-aged children. Program planners may want to take this into account when determining who should participate in work first. However, some administrators have found that it is not more expensive to serve parents with young children because they tend to have fewer children and often rely on relatives for child care.

32. Unit operating costs are the cost per participant over a given period of time.

✔ **Flexible scheduling.** Limiting the number of required hours of participation, and maintaining flexibility in scheduling those hours, can reduce child care costs. For example, the San Diego SWIM program referred individuals to activities that coincided with their children's school hours. Parents then needed only some preschool, after-school, "backup," and summer care, so costs were noticeably reduced.

✔ **Close monitoring of participation.** Close monitoring will ensure that child care expenditures support active participation. In addition, reducing the number of months that individuals participate in work first—through close monitoring and use of short-term activities—will also reduce child care costs (though participants may receive transitional child care benefits after leaving the program).

IV.

Structuring Activities: Advice on Program Components

Work first program activities teach participants the skills that they need in order to look for, find, and keep a job. Part IV of this guide (sections 23-31) describes nine activities frequently included in work first programs: applicant job search; orientation; assessment; job club; job development; education; training; work experience and subsidized employment; and retention and reemployment services. They are discussed in roughly the order in which a participant might encounter them as she moves through the program. The core work first activity is job search, and running effective group job clubs is perhaps the most important element of work first implementation. If you read only one section of this guide, read section 26, on job clubs. However, job search alone will not help all participants find jobs. The other activities round out the program, making it more successful than job search alone. The quality of all these activities, and the extent to which they support the goals of work first, can determine the effectiveness of your program.

23. Applicant Job Search

Applicant job search (AJS)—in which individuals are required to look for a job prior to approval for benefits—has become increasingly popular in recent years as a component of work first programs. Proponents of AJS argue that it can accomplish two important things: it can reduce welfare costs by diverting people who can find jobs relatively easily from coming on welfare; and it can send a message to applicants that the goals of work and self-sufficiency will be emphasized from the outset of their contact with the welfare system. Focusing on applicants, however, means spending resources on many individuals who would have found employment quickly on their own or who will not be approved to receive welfare. This diverts resources from longer-term recipients, who may need program services more (see section 8, on participation requirements). You might therefore consider other ways to communicate an early message about the importance of work, and focus instead on quickly moving approved applicants into work first.

Suggestions for AJS

If you do decide to run an AJS activity, the following advice can help you do so more effectively.

✔ **Do not require only individual, unsupervised job search.** The easiest and cheapest way to run AJS is to tell applicants to look for work during the application approval period, provide some criteria for employer contacts, and require minimal reporting (once or twice) on progress. However, this is not the most effective job search approach (see section 26, on job clubs). Nor is it a cost-free strategy: even a minimal AJS activity will incur costs for support services and staff time for determining exemptions and monitoring compliance.

✔ **Find a balance with a more intensive, but contained, job search.** At the same time, it may not make economic sense to run a full-fledged job club for welfare applicants. One suggestion is to include group activities in AJS but at a less intensive level than in the regular work first job clubs. An alternative is to use individual job search but provide additional staff support, such as access to job developers or work first case managers. The JOBS program in Oregon has set up resource rooms in welfare offices in which applicants as well as recipients, under the general guidance of staff, can access computerized lists of job leads, use computers to prepare résumés, obtain printed material on interviewing techniques, and receive other assistance.

✔ **Treat the job search requirement seriously.** Some AJS programs set ambitious targets for required employer contacts but do not follow up to

confirm whether the requirements are being met. Applicants will find out very quickly if AJS is essentially a paperwork requirement, and it makes little sense to impose a requirement that you do not have the capacity to monitor or enforce.

✔ **Understand the other needs of welfare applicants.** People applying for welfare are often in desperate situations and need immediate help dealing with the crises that have led them to welfare. Even if they want to work, applicants may not be able to focus on job search until they have addressed these other immediate concerns. One solution is to make available resource lists and other information and allow participants to use time and telephones during their first few days of AJS to arrange for housing or child care or to address other needs. Another is to assign a case manager to AJS to answer questions about available services and to provide referrals when appropriate. Some programs also include up-front lump sum payments to divert those applicants who need only one-time assistance.

✔ **Link AJS with the rest of the work first program.** Any momentum gained by getting applicants to look for work can be lost if there is not a well-defined and quick next step. If approved applicants do not enter work first relatively quickly, then it might be useful to have some other form of follow-up to discuss the AJS and help clients connect it with their plans for getting a job. The experience of AJS should also be taken into account in structuring the work first program. For example, the job search component may be shorter if participants have already spent time looking for a job, and job clubs should build on, rather than duplicate, skills learned during AJS.

✔ **Assess the value of AJS as you go along.** Because AJS is an unproven and potentially costly strategy, it may be prudent to try it on a pilot basis and monitor its cost and its effect on welfare approval rates. If certain outcomes—like the number of welfare applications, the percentage of applications approved, or the number and percentage of approved applicants who are working—have not moved in the desired direction, or if AJS has been very costly to implement, it may make sense to rethink the strategy.

24. Orientation

As a participant's first experience with work first, the orientation plays a crucial role in setting the tone for the program as a whole. In general, the orientation should accomplish three core things:

- Briefly describe the program to give participants an idea of what they will do and what will be expected of them

- Convey a clear message about the program's goals and explain why those goals are important
- Market the opportunities presented by the program and motivate participants to begin their job search

Unfortunately, these core purposes are often lost sight of because orientations try to accomplish too much and get bogged down in details. Orientation frequently is used for myriad other tasks, from administering assessment tests to filling out extensive paperwork.

Orientation is also the point in welfare-to-work programs where participation falls off the most; programs report that typically, as many as half of those scheduled for orientation fail to attend.[33] It is worthwhile, therefore, to focus effort and resources on marketing, communication, and follow-up to bring people in to orientation. (See also section 33, on maximizing participation.)

Ideas for Effective Orientations

✔ **Keep the orientation as simple as possible, so that the basic message gets through.** Assess all elements of your orientation and decide what you really do and do not need, and what can be simplified. For example, are assessment tests really needed at this stage if virtually everyone is going into job search? Can program rules be rewritten from long paragraphs in legalese to lists in plain English? Can some forms be consolidated or combined?

✔ **Use a skilled and trained presenter who can energize participants and get across the program message.** Good presenters can manage to weave the message into the paperwork and other elements, pull out the most important points and make them stick, and motivate participants with their own enthusiasm.

✔ **Keep the orientation short and to the point.** You may want to consider using the orientation to focus on the message and motivation, with only a brief description of what the program entails and little if any paperwork. The orientation will be short—perhaps an hour or less—but it can get across the work first concept and motivate participants. It can also make the program feel different from others that participants may have been through before. However, it is then up to case managers to go over the program requirements and paperwork with participants individually.

33. Increasing attendance at the program orientation was one of the key accomplishments of the integrated case management test in the JOBS Evaluation. Over time, integrated case managers in Columbus, Ohio, achieved an 86 percent orientation attendance rate, versus 65 percent for a traditional case management approach (see Brock and Samuel, 1995). See section 17 for more on integrated case management.

✔ **Integrate the orientation with the initial assessment or the first day of job club.** Some programs find that a separate orientation is not necessary and that case managers or job club facilitators can most effectively get across the program message. This has the added benefit of eliminating a step in the program flow, thereby saving staff time in scheduling participants and eliminating a dropout point for participation. However, it can complicate scheduling, and it risks losing uniformity in the information and message that participants receive. Moreover, if the orientation is integrated with job club, make sure that time and assistance are available for participants who need to arrange child care and take care of other matters that generally are addressed before participants begin their job search.

Additional Orientation Suggestions

✔ Reward those who arrive on time by starting on time. Have something for people to begin to work on right away, and after a certain time require latecomers to reschedule.

✔ Brainstorm about the benefits—financial and otherwise—of going to work. This can set a positive tone and give people their own motivations for participating. (See also section 34, on motivating participants.)

✔ Make the orientation interactive by asking questions and involving participants in other ways. If there is a lot of material to read, having participants take turns reading aloud can hold people's attention better than if the presenter reads everything.

✔ Use multiple speakers, videos, or other tools to diversify the presentation and to break up a long session.

✔ Ask a guest speaker who has been through the program to tell her success story. A former welfare recipient can be the best salesperson for the program.

✔ Have a child care specialist describe available options and answer any questions parents may have.

✔ Have a job developer stop in to announce current openings. This can demonstrate that the opportunities you are marketing are real.

✔ End on a positive note by discussing ways the program will support participants' move to work.

✔ Make sure people leave knowing exactly what is expected of them, what their next step will be (such as a scheduled meeting with their case manager or an activity assignment), and whom to call with any follow-up questions.

25. Assessment

In a work first program, assessment serves to identify participants' employment skills and interests and their barriers to getting a job. In keeping with the program's goals, this is a narrow function, not meant to discover or address all of a participant's personal and employment issues. Some programs conduct a formal assessment only with those participants whose initial job search is not successful. Others break the assessment into two stages: an initial assessment to identify immediate barriers to employment or participation in job search, and a more in-depth assessment for those who have been unable to find a job.[34]

The Initial Assessment

The purpose of the initial assessment is to discover and address any immediate barriers to participation in job search, as well as to make sure that child care, transportation, and other supports are in place. Many programs hold meetings between participants and case managers or other staff immediately following the orientation to conduct the initial assessment. This helps to get participants started right away. The time between assessment and the first day of job search can then be used by participants to arrange for child care and take care of any other immediate legal, health, or other personal problems (see sections 35 and 36). The case manager should have some leeway in scheduling the beginning of job search to accommodate the resolution of these issues.

The initial assessment is also an opportunity to start participants thinking about their job search, and to identify job skills and interests. Simple questions can begin to get at this without in-depth testing or assessment. In this way, case managers can turn the assessment around, helping participants build on their strengths rather than simply identifying barriers. The initial assessment is also often the point at which case managers and participants begin to develop an employment plan (see section 32). If scheduling difficulties create a long delay before participants can begin group job search, you may want them to start looking for a job on their own. If so, the assessment should include job search tips that will point them in the right direction.

The In-Depth Assessment

A more in-depth assessment may be reserved only for those who have completed the job search component but were not successful in finding employment. Most participants will not make it to this point; instead, they will find

34. For more on assessment, see Auspos and Sherwood, 1992.

work, become exempt, or be in conciliation or sanction status.[35] The number of participants who need assistance beyond job search may be greater in areas with high unemployment or more disadvantaged caseloads.

The in-depth assessment may include investigation of the participant's skills, abilities, and interests, and barriers to success in the labor market. It may also include research into possible employment options that had not been explored in the previous job search. Even the in-depth assessment, however, should be limited to producing information that will be useful to both the participant and program staff in determining the next step within the scope of the program. Extensive formal testing may not be necessary or appropriate. For example, many staff report that detailed test data on participants' vocational interests do not provide them with information beyond what they know from talking with participants, and may be of little use in situations in which training and employment options are limited.[36] Defining the scope and purpose of the assessment is especially important if it is done by an outside contractor, who may have different assessment goals from those of the work first program.

The outcome of the in-depth assessment should be a plan for the participant's next steps, whether renewed job search, work experience, education or training, counseling, or a combination of activities. Even at this stage, however, employment is still the short-term goal.

26. Job Club

Job search is the central activity of a work first program. While individual job search—in which participants are instructed to make job contacts on their own and to report regularly on their progress—is least expensive, structured group job search—commonly known as job club—appears to be more effective. Job clubs generally include three components: a classroom segment, a phone room, and active job search. A job club in which all three of these components are strong can make all the difference in the success of your program.

There is no fixed rule about how large job clubs should be or how long job search should last. However, some generalizations can be made. Skilled facilitators working with groups of approximately 20 participants seem to be able to balance individual attention for those who need it with positive group dynamics. Most job clubs last three to four weeks, with some lasting as long as 12 weeks (see Appendix A for limitations on job search under TANF)—although

35. Based on participation data in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton, Brock, Farrell, Friedlander, and Harknett), forthcoming.

36. Doolittle and Riccio, 1992.

practitioners agree that after a certain point, if a participant has not found a job, additional job search is not likely to be fruitful. At that point, program administrators may wish to conduct an in-depth assessment (see section 25) to identify barriers and plan alternative employment strategies.

Ten Guidelines for Running Effective Job Clubs

✔ **Make the goal of job search finding a job.** Be explicit about the goal of job search—to find a job that the participant can get now. This should not be just an "informational" job search, in which participants learn about employment opportunities to get a sense of what they want to do and to find out what additional training or education may be needed to get there. In addition, be clear about your employment expectations. For example, is only full-time work expected, or should participants take part-time work if that is available? Should participants aim to achieve a certain wage, or should they take the first job they are offered?

✔ **Combine classroom instruction with actual job search.** The best job clubs combine classroom activities with actually going out and looking for a job. Some programs have group activities in the morning or afternoon, with participants spending the other half of the day making contacts and interviewing. Alternatively, the classroom segment may be a few days to a week long, followed by active job search and group use of telephone banks. If your program includes job development (see section 27), linking that with job club can make both components more effective.

✔ **Have a well-equipped phone room.** Telephones are crucial equipment in job search. A phone room allows participants to apply the skills they learn in the classroom by calling prospective employers, learning about openings, and arranging interviews. Participants should be on the phones making contacts by the end of the first week of job club, if not sooner (some job clubs have people bring in leads and start making phone calls on the second day). Phone rooms should contain resources to help participants identify potential employers, including telephone directories, classified advertisements from local newspapers, and job leads developed by program staff or other participants. There should also be some structure to the phone room component of job club, with an instructor available to offer advice and direction, and opportunities provided for participants to share experiences and brush up on their job search and interviewing skills.

It helps to have enough phones to accommodate not just those in group workshops, but all participants who might need to use them. Having additional phones where participants can retrieve messages can help those who have no phone at home or who would like a professional-sounding

message to greet potential employers. Make sure that staff or participants do not answer those phones, and use recorded professional greetings that do not mention the welfare department.

✔ **Use hands-on approaches to teach practical job search skills.** Job search skills include: how to find job leads and make job contacts; how to complete job applications; how to conduct a successful interview; how to prepare a résumé and cover letter; and how to identify and market your strengths and talents. The most hands-on techniques are the most effective, including filling out sample applications and practicing mock interviews (even videotaping them so participants can see how they come across to prospective employers).

✔ **Motivate participants in their job search.** Motivation and a positive attitude are key job search skills. Remind participants of why they will be better off working, for both financial and other reasons. An enthusiastic instructor can also help to motivate participants. Many participants enter the program with low opinions of their own skills and abilities. They may not feel they are qualified for any available jobs and may not have the confidence needed to make cold calls and approach potential employers. Helping participants identify their strengths, including skills they may not have recognized—such as all the skills associated with caring for a family—can increase motivation and self-esteem and help participants identify job opportunities. (See section 34 for more suggestions on motivating participants.)

The most important motivation in a job club can come from the participants themselves. Often by the third day or so, someone in the group has gotten a job interview. By the end of the first week, someone has gotten a job. As this happens, the mood of the group changes. Participants become more excited about finding a job and more optimistic about their opportunities. They also feel more pressure to succeed as more of their peers find jobs.

✔ **Encourage participants to make numerous job contacts.** At the entry level, finding a job is largely a numbers game, so job search is largely about encouraging participants to make as many contacts and apply for as many positions as possible. To support this approach, it makes sense to calculate participation requirements (outside of group activities) in terms of contacts or interviews rather than hours. The number of job contacts required should be ambitious but realistic; requirements in programs that MDRC has observed range from 6 a week to 30 a day, but "contacts" is defined differently in different places. Requirements should emphasize successful outcomes over simply going through the motions. For example, you might give participants the option of completing one of the following each week: 50 cold calls or in-person contacts, 10 leads for actual job openings, or 3 job interviews.

✔ **Treat the job club like a job.** The job club is a chance to acclimate participants to the world of work. Attendance requirements get participants in the habit of arriving somewhere on time each morning and ensure that child care and other barriers have been addressed. A dress code can enhance self-confidence and ensure that participants are ready to go to an interview at any time. Group activities can emphasize interpersonal skills and give participants experience in communicating with supervisors and co-workers. In these ways, and by incorporating into the curriculum a discussion of what will happen once participants are working, job search can also enhance job retention (see section 31 for more on retention).

✔ **Help participants learn from each other and from their experiences.** Participants should share job leads that they cannot use themselves with the rest of the group. Debrief participants to learn about their job search experiences—what went well and what failed—and to help them improve job search skills. Sharing job search and interview experiences also enables participants to learn from each other.

✔ **Hire an engaging instructor.** Perhaps the single most important element of a job club is the instructor. More than any other program staff member, the job club instructor needs to be outgoing, motivating, able to engage participants, and skilled in group facilitation (see section 14, on hiring and training staff). Hiring an instructor with personal experience on welfare (in addition to other qualifications) can work especially well. For example, in one job club in Riverside, California, the instructor, a single parent and former welfare recipient, was able to use her own success story to counter every barrier to work suggested by participants.

✔ **Celebrate success.** Publicly recognize the achievements of participants, from arranging job interviews to getting a job. In addition to providing positive reinforcement, publicizing success can encourage and inspire other participants. Many offices post photos of program graduates in public waiting areas. In a Los Angeles office, a bell is rung whenever someone gets a job.

27. Job Development

Not all work first programs include job development, in which staff identify unsubsidized job openings for participants. However, many programs that use job development attribute to it much of their success in moving participants into employment. Those participants who have little work experience or who have been out of the job market for a long time may need help networking with employers and may need more personalized attention than they get in a job

club. Job development may be especially critical in tight labor markets, to help program participants find and fill scarce job openings. This type of job development may not create new employment opportunities, but job developers who have built relationships with employers can give program participants first crack at available jobs.

Critics of job development argue that it detracts from the message that it is the participant's responsibility to find a job and makes the participant less committed to remaining in a job. They also argue that getting one job on her own gives a participant the skills and self-confidence that she needs to find another job if the first one is lost. Hiring specialized job developers can also increase a program's cost.

In the context of work first, job development can be most useful as an additional resource, rather than a substitute for job search by participants. The following are some of the ways in which job development can be incorporated into a work first program:

✔ **All staff and participants can act as job developers in identifying job openings.** At its most basic, job development is about identifying potential job leads that can be used by participants. Even if the program has no specialized job developers, all staff, from receptionists to the office director, can keep their eyes open for employment opportunities. Participants can also be encouraged to bring in leads that are not of interest to themselves but may be useful for others. These can be compiled into daily or weekly lists, posted on a bulletin board, or added to a computerized listing. Such job leads can be a valuable resource for participants as they conduct their job search. In a large city, it may be especially effective to have participants turn in leads to a central job bank. In contrast, having a specialized staff member responsible for development may make more sense in a rural area with few employers, so that the same employers are not approached over and over again by different people.

✔ **Job developers can recruit employers to hire through the program.** Job developers can go a step further and develop relationships with local employers so that employers commit themselves to hire through the program. Many job developers view their role as that of a staffing service, providing a pool of labor and often screening applicants for the employer, who is considered a "customer" or "client." For example, staff at America Works, a private, for-profit job placement program for welfare recipients, make cold calls, work existing accounts, network through business associations, and use other means to develop relationships with employers and to encourage them to hire program participants.

In this role, job developers often focus on large employers who regularly have entry-level job openings. These may include representatives of large

service industries, such as hotel and restaurant chains, as well as manufacturing firms and other businesses. Some job developers try to target jobs that are high-wage or that offer opportunities for advancement. Some programs also hold job fairs to help connect participants with employers. Despite the possibility of employer recruitment, job developers should be sensitive to issues of stigma. Some employers may be deterred from hiring welfare recipients, and some participants may not want employers to know that they are on welfare.

✔ **Job developers can help match participants with jobs.** One resource that job developers can bring to potential employers is their knowledge of the program's participants; by screening job applicants, they can save the employer time in the interviewing process. Job developers can also use their knowledge of employers to help participants by giving them information about the position, the workplace, and the personality of the employer. Job developers often follow up on newspaper ads and leads brought in by participants and staff to find out more about the jobs and what the employers are looking for. Many job developers practice mock interviews with participants before referring them to employers. By knowing both parties, the job developer can help make a better match, improving the chances of success. The job developer can also act as an advocate for participants by recommending applicants who may not have all the stated job qualifications but who the developer thinks will be a good match for the job.

✔ **Job developers can be a resource for both staff and participants.** Job developers' knowledge of the labor market can be a major resource for program staff and participants. Beyond just identifying and sharing job leads, job developers can provide information about the types of available jobs for which participants may be qualified. This information can serve as a reality check for participants who may have unrealistic short-term employment goals. It can also help participants identify employment possibilities that they might not have thought of. In smaller programs, job developers can get to know participants individually and tailor development activities to the skills, interests, and geographical locations of participants.

✔ **Job developers can provide extra assistance to some participants.** Job developers should be careful to avoid working only with those participants who are most able to find jobs on their own. Some programs refer participants who are having trouble finding a job to a job developer for more intensive guidance. Job developers can use their knowledge of the job market to help those participants reevaluate their search, identify additional leads or fields of opportunity, and improve job search and interviewing skills.

✔ **Job developers can build support for the program among employers.** Some job developers become involved in business and civic organizations, in order to create good will for the program and to get opportunities to interact with employers without always asking if they are hiring. The Employment Department at Washington Works, a Seattle-based job training and placement program, staffs an Employment Advisory Council, which includes local companies such as Microsoft, Nintendo, and Nordstrom. The council provides advice on how the program can best serve the needs of employers.

✔ **Job developers can help change the culture of the office.** Enthusiastic and visible job developers can add a sense of energy to the work first office, motivate both participants and case managers, and help change the overall culture of the program. Job developers can stop in at orientations, job clubs, and other activities to publicize leads and offer advice and encouragement to job seekers. Some job developers use on-site job fairs to motivate participants and create an employment-focused office environment.

28. The Role of Education

Many welfare-to-work programs use education as a means of getting people to the point where they can get a job that pays well enough for them to become self-sufficient. A work first approach instead suggests that it is best to get into the workforce—even in a lower-paying or part-time job—and work up from there. The effects of adult education on employment and earnings are complex and appear to be inconsistent.[57] However, short-term education can be a useful activity for those who are unsuccessful in their initial job search. Program planners might also consider allowing opportunities for participants to combine part-time work with education, so that participants can improve their skills while they gain work experience. Note, however, that federal law places limits on the number of participants who can be in certain types of educational activities and on what types of educational activities can count toward participation requirements (see Appendix A for a listing of allowable activities).

The following guidelines can help programs tailor education to fit into the framework of a work first philosophy that emphasizes quick employment. In general, these guidelines require case managers to work closely with education providers—rather than just referring participants over—and to pay increased attention to the quality and appropriateness of the educational service, both for the participant and for the employment goal.

57. For a summary of research on adult education for welfare recipients, see U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (prepared by Edward Pauly), 1995.

General Guidelines for Education Activities

✔ Encourage or require participants to complete a job search before entering education activities, and follow education immediately with additional job search.

✔ Make sure that mechanisms to monitor attendance and measure progress are in place. A large proportion (often more than 40 percent) of people who enter adult education as part of a welfare-to-work program do not complete their education program, and attendance rates among those enrolled in adult education appear to range from 50 to 75 percent.[38] Be prepared to reassign to job search or other activities those participants who are not attending classes regularly or are not making progress.

✔ Make sure that education is closely linked to the employment goal. Depending on the type of education, that may mean looking for short-term programs or programs that focus on job-related skills, integrate education with skills training, have high completion rates, or prepare students for fields with a significant number of job openings.

✔ Encourage or require participants interested in education to combine it with employment. Make this a formal part of the program, rather than just rhetoric, by allowing participants to meet program requirements with some combination of school and part-time work. Look for employment opportunities that are in a related field to enhance what is being learned, and that are at or near education sites to make the combination of school and work more feasible. Administrators in Los Angeles found that some education providers were willing to adjust classroom schedules for students who worked part time.

✔ Encourage and support participants in pursuing education once they are working. For example, Florida provides funding for participants to access education and training for up to two years after leaving welfare.

✔ Structure contracts to focus education providers on desired outcomes. In Los Angeles, for example, a shift to performance-based contracts resulted in a shift in the focus of basic education providers.[39] Providers and instructors knew that the goal was short-term education followed by employment. Some schools even added job resource rooms, and worked to place participants in jobs as they completed their education.

✔ If participants enter the work first program already self-enrolled (and making progress) in employment-focused education, allow them to continue. Provide flexibility in meeting participation requirements by scheduling job search or other activities around school hours.

38. U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (prepared by Edward Pauly), 1995.

39. Weissman, 1997.

Approaching Different Levels of Education

- **Adult basic education (ABE).** Lack of basic skills (generally defined as reading and math skills below the eighth-grade level) does not automatically mean that a participant will not be able to find a job, and ABE may be inappropriate for many participants whose experiences in school have been negative. In addition, MDRC survey results suggest that many welfare recipients would prefer assistance that is directly linked to getting a job.[40] However, for those who are interested in education or who are unsuccessful in their job search, ABE can improve job qualifications and skills as well as self-esteem and confidence. Furthermore, many basic education programs are increasing their focus on employment and adjusting their curricula to emphasize skills needed on the job. The Los Angeles program described above is one example. Setting standards for and closely monitoring progress can also help improve ABE outcomes.

- **High school equivalency (GED).** For some people, a General Educational Development (GED) certificate—commonly referred to as a high school equivalency certificate—can increase access to jobs and training opportunities as well as self-esteem. Work first programs can encourage participants who are close to achieving a GED to do so, even in conjunction with employment. Completion time can be reduced by closely monitoring progress and emphasizing the link between completion and employment.

- **High school completion.** Research shows that people with a high school diploma earn more than those with a GED certificate.[41] Work first participants can take advantage of the adult high schools in many communities to obtain their diplomas. However, unlike a GED, high school completion requires not just passing a proficiency test, but completing the required number of credits. Therefore, high school completion should be considered only for those participants who are within a year or so of graduation.

- **College.** Participants interested in higher education are generally a self-selected and highly motivated group. Work first case managers can help participants who are interested in attending college—and who have the prerequisite high school diploma or GED certificate—tailor post-secondary education to their employment goals. (Remember, too, that college attendance may not count toward meeting federal participation requirements.) Participants in Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

40. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton and Brock), 1994.

41. Cameron and Heckman, 1993.

who want to attend college are required to research their chosen field and convince program staff of their potential for employment in that field.

Most work first programs also emphasize short-term certificate programs rather than four-year degrees—but be advised that participants often end up in remedial courses, which can slow down completion of even short-term education. Some programs have worked with local community colleges to break courses down into shorter, more narrowly defined segments, so participants can begin by learning just what is needed to enter the job market and then continue their education to move ahead in their field. Finally, encourage participants in higher education to take advantage of academic and social supports available on campus.

- **English as a second language (ESL).** ESL is often an automatic activity for participants who are not proficient in English, and participants often stay in ESL for extended periods. At the same time, ESL programs are scarce in many places; as a result, waiting lists and prolonged program deferrals are common. Stepping up monitoring and establishing standards for progress can keep ESL on track as a step toward employment. In addition, ESL programs themselves can become more employment-focused—for example, by emphasizing language skills needed on the job. ESL, however, does not need to be a prerequisite for job search, and, as with other education options, work first programs can encourage participants to combine ESL with part-time work. In Los Angeles, job clubs are conducted in Spanish, and occasionally in Armenian, Vietnamese, and Cambodian. Instructors report that those job clubs tend to have higher rates of employment than do the English-language job clubs.

29. The Role of Training

As with education, vocational training can be a part of a work first program and may enhance its success. There is some research evidence that some types of training can increase the earnings of participants, but the research also suggests that these impacts are concentrated among those who might have gotten jobs and left welfare anyway. That is, the training may have helped some participants get higher wages or more hours of work than they otherwise would have, rather than increasing the total number of participants who became employed.[42] One reason for this may be that participants who choose training are highly motivated and likely to find jobs even without training. Another reason may be that enrollment in many training programs requires a high school diploma or other credentials. Proponents of training argue that by increasing earnings, training helps families not just to get off welfare, but to stay off.

42. Friedlander and Burtless, 1995; Gueron and Pauly, 1991.

The Center for Employment Training (CET) in San Jose, California, is one training program that has produced large impacts on employment and earnings, as well as welfare savings.[43] CET does not require participants to have a high school diploma, and it serves both welfare recipients and those not on welfare. Many of the following ideas on how you can tailor training to a work first approach are drawn from the CET model. If there is a variety of training options in your community, you can give priority to those that include these characteristics. If local programs do not meet these criteria, you can encourage programs to adopt them by renegotiating contracts or using informal pressure. Note also that only training that is directly related to employment may count toward the federal participation rate requirements under TANF (see Appendix A).

Tailoring Training to a Work First Approach

✔ **Make sure the training is tied to employment**. Training should be a route to a job, not an alternative to getting a job. Make sure that those who enter training have specific employment goals of which training is the means to the end. Also, look for training programs that share the philosophy that the goal is a job, not just a certificate.

✔ **Look for programs with close ties to industry**. This linkage can take the form of instructors and staff with industry ties, as well as an industry role in developing and reviewing the curriculum. Ties to industry are signals that the training program is up-to-date in terms of the job market and the skills needed to succeed in jobs. The best programs adapt to the labor market by continually adding and dropping classes as demand shifts. Ties to industry also mean that instructors can use their contacts to develop jobs for participants and that employers know and value the training program as a source of qualified workers.

✔ **Look for short-term programs**. Shorter training programs—those that can be completed in six months or less—are less expensive and mean quicker entry into the labor market. Moreover, participants in longer-term training may find that the labor market has changed by the time they have completed the program. Program administrators in Pensacola, Florida, and Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, worked with training providers and employers to develop new, shorter-term programs for participants subject to time limits.

43. Impacts cited are unpublished MDRC findings from the JOBSTART Demonstration, which provided training for low-income out-of-school youth without a high school diploma. Welfare savings, while large, were not statistically significant due to the small sample size for this group. The final results of the JOBSTART Demonstration are presented in Cave, Doolittle, Bos, and Toussaint, 1993. For other research on CET, see Zambrowski and Gordon, 1994; Burghardt et al., 1992; and Hershey, 1988. MDRC is also conducting an ongoing study to examine whether a similar model can work well in other sites.

✔ **Try to begin training right away.** As a general rule, participants should not be kept on hold for weeks or even months waiting for a work first activity to begin. Yet training programs often operate on a fixed schedule. If possible, find a program that participants can enter as soon as training has been identified as an appropriate activity. If not, engage the participant in other employment-focused activities (such as seeking or beginning part-time or temporary employment) until the training begins.

✔ **Closely monitor attendance and progress.** Step in when participants are not successfully moving ahead toward completion and employment. Try to address the reasons for lack of progress, or rethink the training decision with the participant. Refer those who drop out or cannot complete training to other activities.

✔ **Look for training that simulates a work environment.** Make training full time, like a job, and look for programs that hold participants to the same expectations they would encounter on a job. Also, look for programs that teach participants basic work habits as well as job skills. If training is not full time, consider combining the training with part-time employment.

✔ **Look for programs that have open access.** Many training programs are limited to participants with a high school diploma or other credentials—the same participants who may be more likely to be able to get a job without additional training. However, some training programs are available for, or even targeted to, participants with low education or skill levels. Some also integrate basic skills with training, addressing any educational weaknesses in terms of the skills needed in the particular occupation.

✔ **Look for programs that provide additional support services**. Work first program participants may face many of the same issues when they enter training as when they start a job, and problems with child care, transportation, or personal issues can get in the way of success. Look for training programs that understand these issues and can provide the extra encouragement and support that can make the difference.

✔ **Don't wait for the completion of training to begin job search**. Avoid a gap between program completion and employment by having participants begin their job search before the end of the training program. Recognize, however, that this can be difficult for participants in full-time programs, and be flexible in working the job search around program hours.

✔ **Hold training programs accountable for job placement**. Look for training programs that have strong job placement records and that formally include job placement. Some programs offer reemployment assistance to

graduates who lose their first job. In addition, holding training programs accountable for job placement—and retention—ensures that the training will be tied to employment.

30. Work Experience and Subsidized Employment

Work experience and subsidized employment can provide work opportunities for those participants who are not able to get unsubsidized jobs. In work experience, participants generally work for public and nonprofit employers in exchange for welfare benefits. Participants in subsidized employment generally work for private employers, and the employer is partially reimbursed from diverted welfare funds. Because they receive a paycheck, individuals in subsidized jobs are generally eligible for the Earned Income Credit (see section 39) and other benefits for low-income workers. There are also variations on these structures, discussed below.

Work first administrators may consider large-scale work experience or subsidized employment programs as a means to meet federal work participation requirements (see Appendix A). Doing so can also satisfy public and political support for requiring recipients to work in exchange for their benefits. However, such large-scale programs may conflict with the goal of work first—that is, moving participants as quickly as possible into unsubsidized employment. Work experience and subsidized employment can be productive activities for participants whose lack of work history may have hindered success in job search. Used selectively and carefully designed, both approaches can teach participants basic work habits and give them skills and experience for their résumés. Ideally, these positions can lead to permanent, unsubsidized jobs. Both approaches may also count toward meeting the federal participation requirements.

Unpaid Work Experience

Unpaid work experience (also called community service employment or workfare) is usually structured so that participants work either a fixed number of hours per week or the number of hours equivalent to their grant divided by the minimum wage. Participants are not paid wages but may lose part of their welfare benefits if they fail to work the required hours.

Research on relatively small-scale workfare programs in the 1980s found that, by themselves, the programs did not increase either employment or earnings (although they did impose a mutual obligation, and participants generally performed work that had value to the community).[44] Some argue that newer workfare models—which impose ongoing, full-time work requirements on a broader share of the caseload—will produce different results. However, large-

44. Brock, Butler, and Long, 1993.

scale work experience programs can be difficult to implement and expensive to administer (see section 21, on program costs).

Subsidized Employment and On-the-Job Training

Under work supplementation (also known as grant diversion), states use welfare grants as a source of wage subsidies for participants placed in jobs. Advocates of work supplementation believe that these subsidies act as an inducement for employers to hire participants, creating access to employment opportunities. On-the-job-training (OJT) operates similarly to work supplementation, but OJT is available to individuals who do or do not receive welfare and is funded through employment and training programs rather than diverted welfare grants. Evaluations of small-scale work supplementation programs in the 1980s found that they did not substantially increase the number of individuals who got jobs, but they did increase earnings—that is, they led to jobs that either paid higher wages or provided more hours than the jobs those individuals would have gotten in the absence of work supplementation.[45] Moreover, the programs had these effects even after the individuals finished the subsidy period.

Like unpaid work experience, large-scale subsidized employment programs present major operational challenges. In addition, there is a danger that employers will simply receive a windfall for hiring someone they would have hired anyway. At the same time, there may be a stigma associated with subsidized employment. Employers may be reluctant to hire people on welfare, and participants may be reluctant to work in what they feel are not real jobs. Staff of Milwaukee's New Hope Project (described below) found a lower-than-expected takeup rate of paid community service jobs, and found they needed to spend more effort marketing those jobs to participants. Finally, past programs have found that the administrative hassles that work supplementation presents for employers limit its usefulness as a hiring incentive.

Other Approaches

Some programs have developed creative approaches that combine elements of unpaid work experience and subsidized employment. For example, Vermont has structured its post-time-limit community service employment so that participants receive paychecks (from a contracted payroll firm) rather than welfare checks, and are covered by worker compensation through the state. The New Hope Project in Milwaukee provides an income supplement (outside the welfare system) to low-wage workers and offers minimum-wage community service jobs with private and nonprofit employers to those who are unable to find unsubsidized employment. Because they receive wages, participants in both Vermont and New Hope are eligible for the Earned Income Credit. IndEx is a

45. Freedman, Bryant, and Cave, 1988; Auspos, Cave, and Long, 1988.

Tulsa, Oklahoma, program created by and administered through the Metropolitan Tulsa Chamber of Commerce. Welfare recipients are trained and work at IndEx's central facility, under contract with local private-sector industries, to produce goods that would otherwise have been produced offshore. Successful participants are hired for permanent positions with the private employers.

Guidelines for Work Experience and Subsidized Employment

The following are some ideas about how to make the most of work experience and subsidized employment as part of a work first program:

✔ **Help participants try to find unsubsidized employment first.** Work experience and subsidized employment should be considered after job search and after assessment of a participant's needs. For some, these options may provide useful skills, experience, and a résumé item that can help them succeed in future job search. Try to take the time to develop work slots that teach participants marketable skills and fill the gaps in their strengths and experience.

✔ **Place time limits on work assignments.** Work experience should be used only until unsubsidized employment can be found. Participants can become comfortable in work slots, and employers may not want to part with the extra help. To address these issues, work experience should either be combined with job search or be time-limited and followed by job search. In Vermont, community service jobs are limited to ten months, followed by two months of job search. Positions in New Hope are limited to six months. Techniques such as close supervision, peer support, and active job development can help participants make the transition from work experience into unsubsidized employment.[46]

✔ **Maintain regular contact with both participants and employers.** This is useful for getting feedback on how the placement is working out, reinforcing positive relations with employers, and discovering any job-related issues before they become major problems. To monitor participants' progress, the New Hope Project has added four simple questions to the biweekly time sheets that employers fill out. They ask employers to rate participants as excellent, good, fair, or poor in the following areas: attendance/punctuality; quality/quantity of work; cooperation with supervisor/co-workers; and listens/follows directions/rules. New Hope also asks employers to notify program staff *the same day* if participants miss work, so that they can follow up immediately rather than finding out about a problem only when time sheets are due.

46. Small-scale Supported Work programs in the late 1970s incorporated these aspects and produced increases in employment and earnings, and reductions in AFDC receipt for long-term AFDC recipients. See Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, Board of Directors, 1980.

✔ **Target participants for work with job developers.** In one Los Angeles office, job developers work closely with the work experience participants assigned to the work first office. They monitor participants' performance, help participants identify job leads, and give personal references to employers regarding participants' work habits based on their performance in work experience. This can facilitate unsubsidized employment, but is labor-intensive and may not be possible on a large scale.

✔ **Use the opportunity to help participants work out personal and other issues.** Work experience can provide a transition period during which participants can address transportation, family, and other issues that may have hindered their ability to get and keep unsubsidized jobs. With close supervision, program staff can also use the opportunity to identify and address any on-the-job problems that might jeopardize unsubsidized employment.

✔ **If possible, place participants with employers who have made a commitment to retaining successful employees after a trial period**. In Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, work experience participants can be placed with private employers for up to 13 weeks (at no cost to the employer), with the expectation that they will be hired after that time.

✔ **In developing work slots, avoid substituting them for unsubsidized openings in the labor market.** To avoid displacement, most programs ask employers to affirm that the position is a new one. Close interaction with the employer, to learn about the job description and whether anyone else in the organization is doing or has done those tasks, can also help identify situations where displacement might occur. In developing slots for work supplementation and OJT, employers are generally expected to hire participants who do not meet official job qualifications.

✔ **Find ways to simplify the administrative burden on employers.** This might mean that the welfare department takes on some of the administrative functions typically left to employers. For example, programs might allow employers to submit wage information in whatever form is most convenient, and then convert it into the form required for payment of the subsidy. In Oregon, employers treat participants like any other employee, including sick leave and vacation time, then receive reimbursement for a portion of wages paid.

✔ **Facilitate payments to employers under subsidized employment.** Processing and other delays can inconvenience employers and delay the start of work for participants. To avoid these problems, it can help to have "bridge" money available to cover the period before grant diversion is effective and to compensate for any shortfalls in monthly cash flow.

31. Retention and Reemployment

Many people will leave welfare for work, but many of those will lose their jobs and return to welfare. Interviews with participants in Project Match found that nearly 60 percent lost their jobs within six months, and no single factor explained the bulk of job loss.[47] Program administrators, staff, and participants should have realistic expectations about job loss, so that they see such experiences as part of a process of securing lasting employment, rather than as failures. Several programs are also adding services to their program mix that aim to increase retention and help participants get new jobs quickly if their first ones do not work out.

The decision to spend resources on retention and reemployment services may mean that fewer resources are available for helping new participants find jobs. However, a focus on retention and reemployment may become even more important in the context of time limits (see section 40), which will affect not just long-term welfare recipients but also those who cycle on and off welfare.

Retention and Reemployment Issues

A study of post-employment services in four sites found that participants faced four main challenges as they began work:[48]

- Adapting to the additional costs and demands of working
- Meeting the performance, cultural, and emotional demands of the workplace
- Dealing with negative reactions from family and friends
- Finding a new job if they lost their initial one

This section offers strategies for addressing retention and reemployment in work first programs. Opinions are mixed as to the usefulness of these strategies. For example, staff at Project Match have not found it useful to focus on teaching participants how to keep a job before they have found one. They recommend focusing instead on quick reemployment if (as is often the case) a job does not last. Project Match has developed a dynamic welfare-to-work model that expects participants to move through several different jobs and services before succeeding in long-term employment. Administrators in other programs, however, believe that the chances of job retention can be improved by preparing participants for some of the issues they will confront on the job and by teaching job-keeping strategies.

Research is only beginning to look at the effectiveness of retention strategies, so the added benefit is not yet clear. Results of the Post-Employment

47. Berg, Olson, and Conran, 1991. For more on the dynamics of welfare and work, see Pavetti, 1992.
48. Haimson, Hershey, and Rangarajan, 1995.

Services Demonstration (PESD) may shed light on the effectiveness of these strategies.[49] The demonstration sites provided retention, reemployment, and extended case management services to JOBS participants who obtained employment. Specific services included: counseling and moral support; help with expenses; help accessing benefits; and job search and development assistance for reemployment.

Five Points at Which Retention Can Be Addressed

- **Before participants get a job.** Retention strategies can be incorporated into the program, so that participants learn not only how to get a job but also what will happen when they get one. This includes information about how their grants will be affected, how to budget, skills for interacting with co-workers and supervisors, and general problem-solving techniques. Similarly, the program can include a discussion of job progression, so that participants understand that their first job may not be their ideal job but can be a steppingstone to a better job. Finally, the program should emphasize that the job search skills that participants are learning can be used to look for a better job or to find a new job if the first one does not work out.

- **When participants get a job.** When a participant gets a job, her case manager should review with her what will happen to her grant and should help her obtain transitional and work-related benefits, such as child care, medical assistance, and the Earned Income Credit (see sections 37 and 39). Assisting participants in receiving these benefits is one of the most important and useful retention services that programs can provide.[50] This is also a good opportunity to review and resolve any issues, such as child care, housing, or personal problems, that might interfere with success on the job. America Works conducts an in-depth needs assessment after participants are placed in jobs. Program staff go to great lengths to do whatever is necessary to ensure that participants are able to succeed in employment—for example, helping a participant obtain stable child care and even babysitting a child until care can be arranged.

- **After participants get a job, for those who continue to receive welfare.** Especially in high-grant states, participants may find jobs but still be eligible for welfare if those jobs are low wage or part time. Program administrators need to decide whether the program will continue to work with those who combine work and welfare, in order to help them increase their hours, get a promotion, or find another job that will get them completely off assistance. Retention activities can be especially

49. See Herr, Halpern, and Wagner, 1995; and Haimson, Hershey, and Rangarajan, 1995.

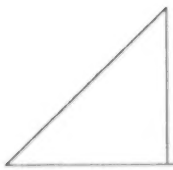
50. Herr, Halpern, and Wagner, 1995.

helpful when they catch participants at the point when something happens to jeopardize continued employment. This requires close contact with employees (and employers, when appropriate) and is staff intensive. Staff need to gain trust and ask probing rather than general questions to get at potential problems, as new employees may be reluctant to reveal difficulties or may not identify them as issues.

- **After participants get a job, for those who leave welfare.** Program staff can follow up with participants who have begun working (and with employers, when appropriate) to learn how things are going on the job and help resolve any problems. Again, this requires more than just checking in after 30 days on the job; it involves building trust, providing frequent contact and support, asking probing questions, and even visiting the employment site when appropriate. In the PESD study, moral support and encouragement were the kinds of help most valued by participants.[51] Another idea is to facilitate peer support groups, in which former participants can share work experiences, solve problems, and provide mutual support. Connecticut operates a "mentoring" program that matches newly employed participants with other former welfare recipients to provide support and guidance.

- **When participants who have gotten jobs lose them.** Many participants who find jobs and leave welfare will lose those jobs and return to the rolls. Welfare systems should establish mechanisms for determining in the eligibility process whether an applicant has been through the work first program before. Some sites may want to make sure that such participants are quickly brought back into the program, so they can begin a renewed job search while also exploring and addressing the reasons why the first job did not last. Others may feel that, with scarce resources, the program should focus on reaching as many new participants as possible. Even so, it might make sense to allow former participants immediate access to job leads and telephones to conduct their own reemployment search—even if they have not reapplied for welfare. Program "alumnae" might be allowed access to the program's job resource room for one or two years after they leave welfare, so that they can use it to conduct a new job search or look for advancement opportunities.

51. Haimson, Hershey, and Rangarajan, 1995.



V.

Working with Participants: Advice on Case Management

Case managers are the front-line staff who translate program policy into practice. Work first case managers must balance two roles: they are responsible for enforcing program mandates and completing administrative tasks, and they act as guides and advisors as participants move through the program. Case managers are responsible for helping participants chart their path off welfare, motivating participants to work toward employment, monitoring participants' progress in program activities, and helping participants overcome barriers—both real and perceived—to successful employment. Part V of this guide (sections 32-36) can help programs create environments that support case managers as they take on these challenging roles, and can provide case managers with some tools to succeed.

32. Developing Employment Plans

Many programs use employment plans to formalize the "contract" between the program and participants and to map out the journey from welfare to work. If job search is an automatic first activity, the employment plan may serve mostly the former purpose. Because participants will soon be asked to look for a job that they can get right now, less time may be spent up front exploring participants' employment goals and creating a long-term road map toward attaining those goals. However, case managers can still use the employment plan as a tool to get to know participants and to help them begin thinking about their job search. In addition, the same employment plan can become a longer-term planning tool for those participants who do not find employment through the initial job search.

Employment plans generally contain the following elements:

- Participants' employment goals
- Clear objectives that lead to those goals
- Specific activities for participants to conduct in order to achieve each objective
- Time periods for completion of activities
- Authorized support services to help participants achieve each objective

General Guidelines for Developing Employment Plans

✔ **The plan should maintain a focus on employment.** While the plan might include a variety of activities, it should remain consistent in its focus on the short-term goal of employment and keep participants on track toward achieving that goal. Similarly, although the plan might address personal and other barriers—such as getting eyeglasses or dealing with a legal issue—these should always be viewed in context as steps toward employment (see section 36, on dealing with personal and other issues).

✔ **The plan should be flexible.** Think of the employment plan not as a permanent document, but as one that leaves room for adaptations and additions as new situations arise. For example, as certain activities are completed, participants may realize that more steps are necessary than originally conceived to reach a given goal. Alternatively, participants may find that they can move to employment more quickly than anticipated. It is a good idea periodically to review with participants the status of their plan and their accomplishments to date, and to make any needed modifications.

✔ **The plan should be realistic.** Case managers should bear in mind that while it is noble for participants to aim high, too many goals or goals that are too high may become overwhelming and unrealistic. Case managers should encourage participants to keep goals focused and somewhat limited in number, at least when the plan is first developed. Emphasize smaller and more doable steps, especially for participants with significant barriers or relatively few life skills.

✔ **The plan should be developed by mutual agreement of the participant and the case manager.** Each employment plan should be individualized, reflecting the program's goals and the case manager's judgment as well as the participant's goals and inclinations. It should be based on the participant's interests, skills, and prior experiences, and on realistic labor market opportunities. The employment plan should spell out not only the steps the participant will take toward employment but also the ways in which the program and the case manager will assist her.

✔ **The plan should broaden opportunities, not limit them.** While the employment plan is meant to be a road map, it should not present only one path to employment. The process of looking for a job can identify both obstacles and additional opportunities that may not have been considered before. The employment plan can be an opportunity to help participants think about what they would like to do and explore the variety of jobs that may fit their interests.

Working with Participants Who Have Little or No Work History

Developing an employment plan may be more difficult for those participants who have little or no work history. Case managers may need to spend extra time discussing these participants' skills and abilities—focusing on what they can rather than cannot do. For example, you can identify the skills used in managing a home and raising children. Also, explore any informal work experience that participants might have, including volunteer work, hobbies, and caring for children other than their own. Help participants identify jobs they can get now, which will be a steppingstone to their longer-term employment goals. Incorporate into employment plans activities that will help build a set of skills and knowledge about the labor market—activities such as networking, mentoring, volunteering, internships, and on-the-job training. Case managers can also work with job club facilitators or job developers to give special attention to participants whose work experience is limited.

33. Maximizing Participation

Staff must bring participants into the program before they can work with them toward employment. Maximizing participation is a key challenge of welfare-to-work programs, and the challenge becomes even greater in light of the high participation rates required under TANF (see Appendix A). In the JOBS Evaluation, 63 percent of those who were required to participate in a typical month had attended orientation, 42 percent were involved in JOBS, and 9 percent met the federal definition of JOBS participation.[52] Below are eight suggestions for maximizing program participation. Implementing these suggestions assumes that adequate staff are available to work with participants and that resources are available to fund sufficient activities—such as job clubs—and support services—in particular, child care—for all those who participate. (See also section 8, on participation requirements, and section 15, on caseload size.)

✔ **Enroll participants in work first quickly.** Most of those who fail to participate will drop out before the first scheduled program activity—usually orientation or a meeting with a case manager. Rapid enrollment of new participants signals that the work first program is serious about mandating participation. Additionally, any messages participants received about work first from the eligibility office will still be fresh in their minds. Staff should promptly get in touch with those who fail to attend their first activity. The work first program in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has specialized intake staff, who schedule participants for orientation, conduct the orientations, and follow up with those who do not attend.

✔ **Get participants into activities quickly.** Delays in assigning participants to activities and lag times between assignment and the beginning of activities can both reduce participation rates and slow down progress to employment. Case managers should have systems in place that will alert them when participants are scheduled to complete an activity. Assign subsequent activities before participants complete the previous one, or schedule activities to flow into one another; for example, have assessment immediately follow orientation, rather than scheduling an additional visit. As much as possible, schedule activities to be open-entry or to start often, so participants do not have to wait long to begin. If an activity does not start right away—because of a waiting list or because the activity operates on a fixed schedule—assign a fill-in activity, such as job search or work on personal issues that might interfere with employment.

✔ **Help participants address immediate barriers to participation.** Participants may need to arrange child care or take care of health, housing, legal, or personal issues before they can fully participate. By helping participants

52. For more on participation rates in JOBS, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Gayle Hamilton), 1995.

locate child care—and facilitating payment for child care—and by helping them to address any other issues promptly, staff can increase participation in the program (see sections 35 and 36 for suggestions).

✔ **Maintain frequent contact with participants.** Case managers should aim for frequent contact—as often as weekly—with participants. A short telephone call to ask how things are going can often identify problems before they become excuses for nonparticipation. It is also a good way to reinforce messages about program goals and mandates. Visiting participants in program activities is an easy way to reach a number of clients at once. A case manager in Riverside, California, has found that asking participants to call or check in with her once a week saves her a lot of time, because she then needs to follow up only with those who do not check in.

✔ **Monitor ongoing participation closely.** When job clubs and other activities are held on-site, case managers can simply drop in to check on participants' attendance and progress. When participants are assigned to outside service providers, however, a system for reporting on attendance and progress is needed. Ideas include: having the site report weekly (or even daily) attendance information by fax or phone; using a shared computer system to transfer information; or assigning a staff member as a liaison between the service provider and work first. (See also section 20, on interagency linkages.)

✔ **Market the program.** Effective marketing of work first at the eligibility office (see section 16) can increase the number who initially attend program activities, and continued marketing can help retain participation throughout the program. Use every interaction with participants as an opportunity to remind them about the strengths of the work first program and about the importance of employment. Explain how the program can help participants achieve their own goals (see section 34, on motivating participants). Place upbeat posters about work first throughout the welfare department and other social services agencies in the community.

✔ **Publicize and enforce program mandates.** Clearly articulating program goals and expectations early and often can increase participation. These expectations should be clear in written materials, call-in notices, warning letters, and employment plans or contracts, and case managers should review them with participants. Make sure participants understand both participation rules and penalties for noncompliance, and then enforce the mandates. When warranted, and with due process, sanctions should be enforced quickly and uniformly.

✔ **Closely monitor exemptions and deferrals.** Establishing individual (rather than standard) deferral periods, or making deferrals short term (no longer than one month) and then reassessing each situation, can minimize delays in program participation (see section 8). Program staff need to keep

track of individuals who have been granted temporary exemptions or deferrals from participation. Once the exemption or deferral period is over, individuals should be quickly called back into the program. An effective management information system can alert case managers when individuals are again required to participate (see section 19); if the MIS cannot do this, case managers need to develop their own system. A specialized "case finder" is assigned this duty in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Another solution: on the date a deferral is granted, schedule an appointment for the end of the deferral period.

34. Motivating Participants

One of the functions of case managers in a work first program is to market the goal of employment and to help motivate participants in their job search. Participants will likely enter the program with a wide range of expectations and with their own personal and employment goals.[53] If participation is mandatory, then many of those who come into the program may not share the work first philosophy or may not be interested in pursuing employment at that time. Many may also have low self-esteem. Often, participants have tried and failed to find jobs on their own, or have worked but have not been able to remain self-sufficient.

It is important to realize that one individual cannot directly motivate another. Case managers can, however, tap into existing motivation in participants by helping them to define their own goals and showing them how the program can help them achieve those goals. The following specific techniques can help case managers appeal to participants' internal motivation:

✔ **Promote the financial and nonfinancial benefits of working.** Let participants brainstorm about why they are better off working, for financial reasons (such as being able to move to a better home or buy their children clothes) to nonfinancial ones (such as self-esteem and independence). Emphasize any financial incentives, including transitional benefits and the Earned Income Credit (see sections 37-39). Some participants may believe that working will make them financially worse off; they may need to be convinced that work will pay before they feel motivated to try.

✔ **Talk with participants about their children.** Their children are a key motivator for parents. Discuss what working will mean for participants' children, both financially and in other ways. For example, participants often say that they would like to be able to buy more things for their children. Working can also make participants better role models for their children and eliminate the stigma children may feel about receiving welfare.

53. See Pavetti, 1993.

✔ **Show the bigger picture.** For many participants, it may be hard to get motivated about an entry-level position. Others may believe that the best way to get ahead is through education and training, rather than through getting a job right away. Explain the philosophy behind work first. Participants may get motivated more easily if they see a path that can lead them to their longer-term goals and if they understand that their first job can be a steppingstone to better things. Walk participants through a sample job progression so that they can see where they might be in five years if they were to start a minimum-wage job today.

✔ **Use your own and others' experiences.** Staff members can be role models for participants. Single parents, working parents, or staff who went to school while working can all say to participants, "I did it, and so can you." Bringing in former participants to share their success stories is another great way to motivate participants and show them that the program can work.

✔ **Celebrate success.** Help participants set attainable goals and then offer positive reinforcement for incremental achievements. For some participants, attending regularly or going on a first job interview is a real achievement. Celebrate publicly when participants find jobs, and make placements very visible in the office by posting the names and photographs of participants who have found jobs.

✔ **Present the program as an opportunity.** Most participants share a belief in the value of work and the long-term goal of self-sufficiency. Emphasize what the program can do to help participants achieve that goal. Encourage participants to take advantage of the services that can help them get off welfare, and assist them in using those services.

✔ **Help participants expand their thinking.** People often get stuck in a pattern of thinking very narrowly about what they are able to do. Explore the positive things participants have accomplished and the range of skills they have acquired. Help participants overcome barriers—both real and perceived—to employment, so that they can focus on their employment goals rather than getting caught up in the difficulties of working.

✔ **Show that you believe in the program and in participants.** Participants often come to the program with low self-confidence and self-esteem. Often, they have tried and failed to find jobs on their own, or have had jobs but not been able to keep them. Staff members need to convey their belief that participants have skills and abilities, that the program can help participants succeed, and that they expect success. Send personal notes to participants' homes—of encouragement if they are having trouble, or of congratulations if they have achieved a success.

✔ **Provide new challenges.** As participants reach incremental goals, new challenges can keep them motivated to achieve more. For example, as participants get jobs, Project Match in Chicago tracks who is still working after three months, six months, nine months, one year, and 18 months, and publicizes this information in a quarterly newsletter. This not only recognizes each step as a positive achievement but also presents a next level for each participant to work toward.

✔ **Talk about welfare reform.** Participants are well aware that welfare policy is changing. Discussing changes such as time limits and work requirements—both those that have already been made and others that are being considered—can motivate participants by reminding them that the financial supports they have now may not be available in the future. Many participants also share the belief that welfare should provide only transitional assistance. Welfare reform can spark discussion of the importance of work and the goals of work first.

35. Facilitating Child Care and Transportation

For a work first program to succeed, participants must be able to attend program activities and look for work. In the JOBS Evaluation, between 77 and 84 percent of new JOBS enrollees in four sites reported facing at least one of seven listed barriers to participation.[54] The most common barrier cited—by between 58 and 72 percent of enrollees—was the inability to afford child care. Between 30 and 40 percent of enrollees reported facing transportation problems. Work first programs generally provide supports for child care and transportation needs. Section 7 discussed policy issues related to child care and transportation. This section offers advice for facilitating the provision of these support services, thereby increasing participation and helping participants succeed in obtaining employment.

Child Care

✔ **Provide information about child care options.** As they enter the program, give participants detailed information about child care benefits and options. Brochures, posters, checklists, and videotapes are all useful tools. Materials should be attractive, engaging, and accessible to participants who have low reading levels or whose first language is not English. Individual work first offices may also want to compile lists of child care providers in their area. The lists should include hours of operation, location, special training of staff—including the ability to serve children with special needs—and registration

54. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton and Brock), 1994. See also Martinson and Riccio, 1989.

instructions. Local resource and referral agencies can provide this information, so that work first offices are not re-creating the wheel. Written materials should supplement, but not replace, information received from staff members. Participants should also know where they can turn for more information or assistance.

✔ **Help participants quickly arrange care while giving adequate time as needed.** Case managers can help participants locate child care by providing information, such as the provider lists described above. Coordinating with a local child care resource and referral agency can also facilitate child care arrangements. At the same time, parents need sufficient time to visit providers and make an informed decision about a child care setting before placing their children in care. Forcing a hasty choice increases the risk of later problems, which could disrupt program participation or employment. Once care has been located, case managers can help expedite the processing of child care payments so that participants can begin work first as soon as possible.

✔ **Help participants make an informed decision about child care.** Pamphlets, checklists, or videos about the criteria for high-quality child care can help parents make this choice. Materials about child care are most helpful when they offer specific, objective information about all forms of child care, including center-based care, regulated family day care, and informal arrangements with relatives or friends. The process of finding and choosing child care can also help participants increase their skills and self-confidence in preparation for job search.

✔ **Understand participants' child care needs.** In helping parents arrange for child care, staff should understand the family's specific child care needs, preferences, and constraints, such as lack of transportation or complex family schedules. Help parents think through the advantages and limitations of available options, in order to choose care that will work best for their situation.

✔ **Help participants identify reliable child care arrangements.** Problems resulting from unreliable child care can disrupt job search and employment. Case managers should discuss with participants the reliability of their child care arrangements, especially when they plan to use informal care. Participants should have backup arrangements, such as a drop-in center or a relative, to which they can turn should their principal arrangements fall through.

✔ **Talk through child care concerns.** If parents are apprehensive about leaving their children in child care, they experience stress and their motivation is undermined. Case managers or child care specialists can alleviate any concerns by talking through these issues with parents and helping them find high-quality care that they trust.

✔ **Provide ongoing support.** Parents who have ongoing access to information and counseling can draw on that support to work through any child care problems that arise. Programs may want to designate a specialized staff person, who is knowledgeable about child care and understands the child care issues confronted by participants, as a contact for child care information and assistance. In addition, programs can avoid disruptions in participation by helping parents to anticipate changes in child care arrangements that may be needed as they move through the program (for example, if their hours of participation change).

Transportation

✔ **Inform participants about transportation assistance and help them take advantage of it.** Most programs offer bus passes, mileage reimbursement, help with car repairs, or other forms of assistance with transportation. Case managers can educate participants about the availability of assistance, help them assemble any required documentation, and facilitate the processing of transportation benefits.

✔ **Help participants think creatively about transportation alternatives.** Participants without their own vehicle or ready access to public transportation will need to identify alternative means. For example, participants can form carpools with other participants who live near them. Case managers in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, encourage participants who have found jobs to join carpools or to pay another employee for a ride. Helping participants get a valid driver's license or clear driving violations can also keep them mobile.

✔ **Help participants identify backup arrangements.** Unexpected problems with transportation can cause participants to miss appointments or even lose a job. Case managers can help participants identify backup alternatives that they can use if their regular transportation falls through.

36. Dealing with Personal and Other Issues

Work first programs (and case managers within programs) vary in the extent to which they help participants cope with personal and family problems that may interfere with their ability to find and keep a job. Most programs take a narrow view, preferring that case managers address only those issues which are immediate barriers to participation. In addition, participants may not initially disclose personal issues to case managers; problems are more likely to become evident in the course of the program. However, when issues do arise that threaten successful employment, case managers should be able to work with participants to address them.

For many issues, case managers may be able to identify resources that participants can utilize on their own. Work first offices should develop local

resource lists that can guide case managers and participants in choosing appropriate options. This can also be an opportunity to teach participants problem-solving skills that can improve their self-confidence and help them when they are off welfare and working. Even when they have referred participants elsewhere, however, case managers may find that they need to follow up, encouraging participants to utilize the services or acting as advocates on participants' behalf. It can be helpful for programs to develop formal or informal relationships with community agencies that can provide services to participants. Programs should also make arrangements to monitor participants' progress in these services, without compromising confidentiality. If needed services are not available in the community, programs might try to provide the services themselves (for example, by setting up a clothing bank on site) or find other ways to meet those needs (for example, by contracting with a local provider to start offering the service).

Programmatic Responses

In Florida and Utah, program staff have found that these issues become more prominent as a work first program matures and more participants find jobs. Those who remain may be more likely to face significant personal issues that have kept them from finding employment. Case managers in those states felt frustrated in working with these hard-to-serve participants and felt unqualified to identify or address many of the barriers they faced. Administrators in both Florida and Utah have responded by hiring specialized staff—often professional social workers with master's degrees—to help case managers deal with these issues. The specialized staff may assist case managers in several ways: training them to identify issues, providing advice for working with participants, offering short-term counseling to participants, or acting as a resource for appropriate referrals to outside providers.

Some participants may have serious problems that may warrant deferral from participation in other program activities. If so, the participant's progress in addressing the problems should be closely monitored, and employment activities should begin as soon as the participant is able. Many issues, however, can be addressed either quickly or simultaneously with participation in job search, other activities, or employment—and staff and participants should recognize that the same issues confront many working people as well. The goal of staff is generally to get participants to the point where they are able to work. Participants can then continue to address the issues while they are working.

Additional Suggestions for Dealing with Personal Issues

Case managers in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)—who have been operating an employment-focused program for long-term welfare recipients for more than two years—have identified some common issues that arise

when working with participants, and they and others have proposed strategies for addressing them. The discussion that follows is less about dealing with hard-core problems than about addressing smaller ones that may arise along the way as participants move through the program. In addition, many of these strategies involve referring participants to specialized service providers; the ability of case managers to assist participants with these issues may depend largely on the presence of such providers in the community.

- **Child care and transportation.** Work first programs generally provide comprehensive support for the child care needs of participants. Most programs also provide transportation assistance to participants in the form of passes for public transportation, reimbursement for gas, or funds for car repairs. Section 7 discusses these support services; see section 35 for ideas on how the program can facilitate child care and transportation arrangements.

- **Clothing.** Some participants do not have an adequate wardrobe for interviews and work. Think about either starting a clothing bank or providing vouchers for a local thrift shop. It is also a good idea to discuss with participants what is appropriate attire and to help them plan their outfits for interviews and work. Participants might be asked to attend program activities dressed as if for a job interview, or one day a week might be designated as "Dress for Success" Day. Program staff should set an example by dressing professionally themselves.

- **Physical health problems.** Any physical limitations that participants have should be accommodated in their employment goals, job search strategies, and employment plans. Case managers should also be prepared to make appropriate referrals for health care services. If medical documentation is required to determine whether exemption or deferral may be warranted, obtain signed releases to get participants' medical records. Case managers may also want to understand SSI eligibility rules and the SSI application process so that they can help participants complete the application and assemble the required documentation.

- **Depression and other mental health issues.** Depression is a common problem among participants in welfare-to-work programs.[55] Case managers need to be trained to identify the signs of depression. Failure to make progress in program activities, apathy, and apparent laziness may all be signals of depression. Some programs refer participants to short-term activities that focus on building self-esteem. Case managers should also have information about treatment facilities that accept Medicaid coverage and should be able to provide referrals to those facilities.

55. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Moore et al.), 1995b.

- **Limited cognitive functioning.** The first step in addressing a suspected cognitive limitation is to document the problem through an assessment. Many programs contract out such assessments to licensed psychologists or certified school psychologists. If an assessment documents an impairment that significantly limits the participant's ability to obtain or retain employment, exemption from the program may be warranted. Otherwise, look for employment or activity options at the participant's ability level. For example, community organizations may offer sheltered workshops or other employment and training programs for people with limited cognitive abilities. In addition, some service industries (including Wal-Mart, McDonald's, and Hardee's) have employment opportunities designed for people who have a low level of cognitive functioning. Try to identify participants' strengths and then match them with a job that will both challenge them and provide the necessary support, and one in which the employer is sensitive to the issue.
- **Domestic abuse.** Relationship problems are a common cause of disruptions in participation and employment. When they arise, case managers should try to figure out the seriousness of the problem and the dynamics of the situation. A referral to short-term counseling—for the participant or the couple—can address some problems. Issues of domestic abuse may not emerge in the early interactions between participants and case managers, since participants may fear the possible consequences of disclosure (for example, removal of children to foster care). Case managers should also be able to refer participants to local resources, such as hotlines and battered women's shelters, and can encourage participants to cooperate with agencies designed to help alleviate abusive situations. If case managers suspect that children are in danger, they need to report the case to the appropriate agency. The family violence provisions in the 1996 welfare law give states the option to screen for domestic abuse and to temporarily waive program requirements that would either prevent participants from escaping violence or unfairly penalize them.
- **Substance abuse.** This may be a particularly difficult issue to address because participants may not be willing or able to admit to or work on the problem. Programs can offer training to case managers in identifying substance abuse problems. Substance abuse problems among partners or family members may also create barriers to participants' employment or program completion. Case managers should have information available on treatment, counseling, and support programs and should make appropriate referrals when necessary. The case manager will have to discuss the issue openly with the participant, because the participant will have to agree to utilize available services. Participants may be extremely reluctant to admit they have substance abuse problems, particularly in states whose primary response to such an admission is sanction or other penalty. In

addition, the 1996 federal law makes ineligible for TANF benefits anyone who—since the bill's enactment—has been convicted of a drug-related felony (unless a state opts out of this provision).

- **Legal problems.** Program participants may be involved in child custody battles, court-ordered visitation agreements with a nonresident parent, or child support hearings and trials. Case managers should be aware of participants' court dates and other commitments that might interfere with program participation. It is also useful to include Legal Services or other court advocates or representatives on the program's resource lists. Some participants may have a criminal record and may be dealing with parole or probation officers. Work first staff should discuss with participants how such information should be presented on a job application or in a job interview.
- **Lack of a telephone.** Not having a telephone can impede job search and can impair communication between participants and case managers. Case managers can help participants who do not have a telephone to get one installed—for example, by providing information on low-cost installation options or by working out agreements for payment of arrears. Programs should also have telephones available for use by participants and should consider providing an answering machine on which participants can receive messages regarding interview appointments and hiring decisions. (See also section 26, on the job club phone room.)
- **Housing issues.** Case managers should learn the best way to reach a participant who does not have a permanent residence, whether through a post office box, message center, or family member or friend who can relay messages. If a participant is or becomes homeless, encourage her to consider all options, including temporarily residing with relatives or friends, or in local emergency and transitional shelters. Help participants put their names on waiting lists for subsidized housing and sign up for local housing assistance programs. Participants who live in subsidized housing may face increased rents as they go to work and their income rises; make sure participants are aware of this possibility and recognize how it affects the trade-off for them between welfare and work.

VI.

Work First in Context: Advice on Related Policies

Work first programs do not exist in a vacuum. Other rules and policies, both within and outside the welfare system, create the environment in which the program operates. Thus, they affect the way participants experience the program's services and mandates and how participants view the trade-offs between welfare and work. Part VI of this guide (sections 37-40) discusses some of these related policies, explains how they affect the design and operation of a work first program, and offers suggestions on how they can support efforts to move welfare recipients into jobs. For example, transitional benefits can cushion the jolt of leaving welfare for work by extending some supports through the first year or years of employment. Other policies—such as financial incentives and the Earned Income Credit (EIC)—can make work pay for participants who get jobs. Finally, time-limit policies put pressure on both participants and work first programs to succeed.

37. Transitional Benefits

Particularly for long-term welfare recipients, leaving welfare can be difficult, both financially and emotionally. Transitional benefits can smooth the transition from welfare to work by continuing to provide government supports for a limited time. They can also help to make work pay for families who leave welfare. There are two main transitional benefits generally available to former welfare recipients: child care and medical assistance. In addition, some programs provide other types of transitional benefits.

Child Care

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 consolidates welfare-related child care programs into block grants to states. Funding from the child care block grant can be used to extend child care subsidies for parents who leave welfare for work. States can also choose to provide transitional child care through other programs available to all low-income working parents. Some states require parents to pay some of their child care costs on a sliding scale.

However transitional child care is structured, work first programs need to market available options to participants and help them take advantage of that support. A study conducted by the General Accounting Office found that utilization rates of Transitional Child Care (a program now consolidated under the block grant) were extremely low, with roughly 20 percent of eligible families making use of the program for at least one month.[56] The study found that in some states, inadequate mechanisms for informing welfare recipients about the availability of the transitional benefits limited the effectiveness of the benefits as work incentives.

Medical Assistance

Because many of the jobs participants get will not provide health benefits, transitional medical assistance can help make work pay and provide security for parents who leave welfare for work. Transitional Medicaid is available for a limited time to most families who would otherwise become ineligible due to earnings. Some states also operate state-funded programs that subsidize medical assistance for low-income families. Because Medicaid is no longer categorically linked to welfare receipt, states will need to decide whether they wish to establish their own link (for example, by creating a single application form for both welfare and Medicaid) and what systems to develop for transferring the eligibility of families who leave welfare for work. Again, work first programs need to educate participants about the availability of medical assistance and help participants take advantage of it.

56. U.S. General Accounting Office, 1992.

Other Transitional Benefits

Some programs provide other types of transitional benefits. For example, Utah allows former participants to access all program services for two years after leaving welfare. This includes assistance for transportation, car repairs, uniforms, and other work-related needs, as well as access to education and training. In addition, former participants are encouraged to ask case managers for help with any issues that might jeopardize employment. Some offices have specialized staff who take over closed cases; in other offices, participants keep their work first case manager for two years after leaving the program.

Facilitating the Use of Transitional Benefits

Individuals will be more likely to take advantage of transitional benefits if they have accurate information about the benefits and if the benefits are easily accessible. Clearly communicating information about transitional benefits can also alleviate the fear that participants may have about leaving welfare for work. Below are some suggestions:

- ✔ Make sure that both work first and eligibility staff understand the criteria for receiving transitional benefits and the importance of these benefits as a complement to the work first program.
- ✔ Include transitional benefits in all work-related discussions at both the eligibility and work first offices. Eligibility staff can include explanations of these benefits in their interviews with new applicants and in regular redetermination meetings. Work first orientation and the first day of job club are also good times to discuss work-related program incentives, including transitional benefits.
- ✔ Case managers and child care staff can mention transitional benefits when program participants are arranging for child care that is needed so that they can participate in program activities. Let participants know that child care assistance will not end with welfare.
- ✔ When welfare recipients start reporting income, send them a letter congratulating them and reminding them about transitional benefits. Include all appropriate application forms.
- ✔ Keep applications for transitional benefits simple. Consider using one application form for both transitional medical assistance and child care, or have cases roll over to transitional benefits automatically, without a new application.

Services Available After Transitional Benefits End

It is also helpful to inform participants about—and assist them in receiving—supports available to them beyond transitional benefits, particularly as they near the end of their eligibility. When Transitional Medicaid ends, states should determine whether any member of the family is eligible for Medicaid under another category. In addition, many states provide subsidized medical coverage for low-income working families and children who are not eligible for Medicaid. Low-income working parents who exhaust transitional child care benefits may be eligible for other federally and state-funded child care programs. Funding for low-income child care benefits is limited, however, so it may be helpful to give parents information on how to access benefits or get on waiting lists early.

States should design fluid delivery systems that bridge the gaps between welfare and transitional benefits, and between transitional benefits and follow-up supports. For example, some states have established systems that automatically roll over child care assistance from transitional benefits to another funding stream. Consistent payment rates and mechanisms can also ease transitions from one funding stream to another.

38. Financial Incentives

Financial incentives are a popular part of state welfare reform efforts. As of May 1996, 30 states had been granted federal waivers to make changes in earnings disregards to help make work pay and ease the transition from welfare to work.[57] By changing the way earnings are counted in determining a family's monthly welfare grant, financial incentives allow recipients to keep more of their earnings from work while still receiving welfare. Financial incentives can also address one of the main criticisms of a work first approach: that it leads to low-wage jobs without benefits, leaving employees in a worse financial position than when they were on welfare. However, it must be recognized that financial incentives will also keep many participants on welfare longer than they otherwise would have been, by raising the level of earnings at which they become ineligible. In additional to its fiscal implications, this poses potential problems in the context of time limits (see section 40).

Financial Incentives and Work First Programs

Field research suggests that, used together, work first and financial incentives might be more powerful than either would be alone, for the following reasons:

- **Financial incentives can help motivate participants to work.** Surveys indicate that welfare recipients have a general desire to work, yet

57. Savner and Greenberg, 1996.

many believe that welfare provides better for their families than work would.[58] In addition, many welfare recipients report that they have worked in the past but have fallen back on welfare because they could not make ends meet. Financial incentives can alter the trade-off between welfare and work.

- **Financial incentives allow participants to accept even low-wage or part-time work.** Financial incentives allow case managers to promote—and participants to see—the value of even part-time or low-wage work, and even for participants who are at the same time pursuing education or training. By providing financial support for work, the incentives can also help those who get low-wage jobs keep them.
- **Financial incentives can add a more positive message to work first.** Financial incentives form a positive message that work will pay and that the welfare system will support recipients' efforts to work. Programs that include financial incentives tend to market the opportunities presented by working, whereas those without them are forced to rely more heavily on the threat of sanctions.
- **Financial incentives can help shift staff attitudes to a work first philosophy.** In Los Angeles, increased earnings disregards played a big role in building staff support for a work first approach.[59] Any reservations that staff may have about pushing recipients into work or being involved with a mandatory program can be eased by the knowledge that if participants pursue work, they will be better off financially.
- **Financial incentives can help change the culture of the eligibility office.** Financial incentives inject discussions about employment into the eligibility office, as workers explain the benefits of working to both applicants and recipients. In Minnesota, eligibility staff reported that they felt financial incentives empowered them for the first time to discuss work with participants.[60]
- **Financial incentives may boost the income-producing power of work first models.** While work first programs have been successful at increasing employment, research has not shown that such programs consistently increase the income of those who get jobs. Financial incentives can address this problem by supplementing the incomes of participants who get jobs.

58. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (prepared by Hamilton and Brock), 1994.

59. Weissman, 1997.

60. Knox, Brown, and Lin, 1995.

Making the Most of Financial Incentives

Financial incentives will increase the income of participants who would have gone to work even in their absence, and thus will help to make work pay for those people. In order to increase total employment, however, the incentives must encourage participants to go to work who would not have gone to work otherwise. The following ideas can help make this happen by promoting communication about and marketing of financial incentives:

✔ **Market financial incentives early and often.** Let new welfare applicants know right away that the incentives can support their efforts to work. Repeat the message in both the eligibility and work first offices, in all discussions about work. Participants who have tried to work and failed may need "proof" that the incentives are real. Keeping the disregard formula as simple as possible, as well as developing effective brochures and sample budgets, may help convince them. Some programs provide participants with blank calculation forms on which they can plug in their own numbers when considering a job.

✔ **Make sure that staff—in both work first and eligibility offices—understand how the financial incentives work.** Staff should be able to explain the details of financial incentives to participants, so that they know exactly what will happen to their grant if they take a job at a given salary. Computer systems can be programmed to quickly calculate these effects for staff and participants. Staff should also understand any trade-offs that might affect how financial incentives work for individual participants; for example, those in public housing may face increased rents as a result of increased earnings. Finally, eligibility staff need to know how to implement the increased disregards so that participants who work receive the appropriate benefits.

✔ **Help participants who work access the financial benefits.** When participants get a job, work first staff should remind them about the financial incentives, provide them with any forms that need to be completed, and facilitate communication with the eligibility office. Simplifying reporting requirements can also help. Some programs hold special orientations for newly employed participants to review financial incentives and transitional benefits, and to demonstrate how to fill out the reporting forms. Work first staff in several programs report that financial incentives are not always consistently or accurately applied. When necessary, program staff should act as advocates, to help participants obtain those benefits.

✔ **Let participants who work clearly see their financial gain.** When participants find employment, they should see the financial incentives at work, increasing their total income, even though their monthly grant may be reduced. Eligibility staff can review the benefits calculation with participants after they receive their first recalculated grant check. Administrators in

Milwaukee's New Hope Project found that employed participants had a hard time understanding how the incentive worked, because the supplemental benefit amount changed each month (mainly due to fluctuations in hours and in the number of pay periods in the month). To address this problem, the program now sends participants an individualized explanation of the benefits calculation as part of their monthly benefits statement.

39. The Earned Income Credit

The Earned Income Credit (EIC)—also known as the Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC—can help make work pay for low-income families. The EIC is a federal tax credit that was worth as much as $3,556 for some families in tax year 1996. While the EIC did not generally count as income under the AFDC program, this is a state decision under TANF. States can support work effort by not including the EIC in eligibility and benefit calculations.

Educating participants about the EIC and helping them take advantage of it can enhance their success and the success of your program. The following suggestions can assist you in promoting the EIC.[61]

✔ Publicize this valuable benefit. Hang posters promoting the EIC in prominent places around the program office. Pass out brochures about the EIC to participants, insert brochures in mailings, and include the EIC in discussions about financial incentives and transitional benefits. Include information about the EIC in materials given to participants once they find a job.

✔ Train staff in work first and its partner organizations about the EIC. Programs often fail to effectively market the EIC to participants because the staff do not clearly understand it themselves.

✔ When explaining the benefits of the EIC to participants, make sure that the idea of "refundability" is clear—that is, even if they don't owe taxes, they can still get a credit if they file a tax return.

✔ Let participants know whether the EIC will count against their grant if they are combining welfare and work.

✔ Discuss the pros and cons of advance payment with participants who find jobs. People who choose advance payment will get a portion of the EIC in their paycheck and the rest at tax time. While advance payment can increase employees' take-home pay, some people prefer to get a lump sum. Employees should understand these and other trade-offs so that they can make an informed choice.

61. Many of these ideas were suggested by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which operates an Earned Income Credit Campaign. Write or call the center (see Appendix B) for more information about the EIC or a free outreach kit containing posters, brochures, and fact sheets.

- ✔ Have tax forms available to participants throughout the year, but particularly during tax season. These forms are available free of charge from the IRS (1-800-TAX-FORM), and you are allowed to make photocopies.
- ✔ Work with local business associations to educate employers about the EIC and promote its use.
- ✔ If your program has a job developer, he or she should market the EIC to employers. Many employers do not know that the EIC will supplement the wages of low-wage workers at no cost to them and do not understand that employers can add the EIC to the employee's paycheck each pay period.
- ✔ Let participants know where they can get free tax-filing assistance, or look into providing assistance on site. VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) is a free IRS-sponsored program to help low-income workers fill out their tax forms. Staff can make lists of local VITA sites available to participants and inform them of what information they need to take to a VITA site.

40. Time Limits

Federal law restricts states from using TANF funds to provide benefits to most families for more than five years (though states can exempt up to 20 percent of their caseload from the federal time limit). Beyond the limitations on the use of federal funds, the law gives states the flexibility to design their own time-limit policies. For example, states can set time limits shorter than five years. States can also use maintenance-of-effort or other state funds to provide benefits that do not count against the federal time limit or that assist those who have exhausted their federal time limit. Many states have already established time limits under federal waivers. In general, these tend to be shorter than five years, but allow opportunities for exemptions and extensions.

Although time limits are widely supported, no evaluations of this approach have been completed.[62] The first state-initiated time-limit programs are still relatively new, and only a handful of people had reached the time limits as of late 1996. The stated goal of time limits is the same as that of work first—to move welfare recipients into paid employment. Time limits can help to motivate participants in their job search, and in doing so may bolster the program's success. However, as time limits change the nature of welfare, they affect work first programs as well. Program planners and administrators who couple a work first program with time limits should be aware of the following issues:

- **Time limits raise the stakes for welfare-to-work programs.** Given the importance of minimizing the number of people who reach the end

62. For some early findings on time-limited welfare policies, see Bloom and Butler, 1995. A follow-up report is scheduled for 1997.

of the time limit, time limits put added pressure on states and localities to design and implement effective programs to help welfare recipients find jobs.

- **Time limits increase the importance of serving the entire time-limited caseload.** The program should be able to serve all those subject to the time limit. The criteria for exemption or deferral from work first need to be coordinated with the criteria for exemption from or extension of the time limit. In addition, the program needs to take special care to avoid serving only the most job ready, and to give special attention to those who have a more difficult time finding work.
- **Time limits increase the importance of moving participants into and through the program quickly.** Time limits make it more important than ever to utilize activities that are short term and have open entry, as participants cannot afford to wait for activities to begin. If access to work first is limited or there are delays in enrolling, states should consider waiting until participants are in the program to start their state's time-limit clock. (Note, however, that the time limit on federally funded assistance will still apply.)
- **Time limits change the environment of work first.** Staff and participants need to understand the time limits thoroughly and to take them into account when designing employment plans. Staff need to prepare applicants and recipients early on, explaining the terms of the time limit and spelling out what it means for them. It is not yet clear what program strategy makes the most sense in the context of time limits. Some argue that a rapid employment focus is best, because it helps recipients find jobs quickly and thereby save their months of welfare eligibility. Others contend that recipients should use those scarce months for education or training that will prepare them for jobs that will allow them to stay off welfare.
- **Time limits can penalize participants who combine welfare and work.** Welfare recipients can use up valuable months of eligibility for low partial grants, especially if financial incentives allow more families to combine welfare and work (see section 38). Discuss these trade-offs with participants who work; some may choose to "bank" their time on welfare for when they might need it more. Program planners may also want to consider either not counting against the time limit any months during which participants work or counting each of those months as only a portion of a month (again, they will need to use state funds to do this).
- **Time limits pose risks not just for long-term recipients but also for those who cycle on and off welfare.** In the context of a time limit, program planners may want to invest more in services that help people

keep jobs. You may also want to design the time limit so that it is not a lifetime limit. (Note, however, that the five-year time limit on *federal* funds is a lifetime limit.) For example, a Florida pilot program limits welfare receipt to 24 months in a 60-month period or 36 months in a 72-month period, depending on participant characteristics. An alternative is to allow participants to earn back time on their time-limit clocks by working. For example, participants in Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project can earn back six months on their time limit for every year they work and do not receive welfare.

- **Time limits may increase opportunities to invest in work first programs.** The expected savings resulting from time limits on welfare receipt may provide opportunities for programs to make up-front investments in serving more participants or improving program services.

Appendix A

Work-Related Provisions of the 1996 Federal Welfare Legislation

This appendix summarizes the work-related provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The legislation converts the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program into block grants to states, giving individual states great control over the shape of their welfare programs. The legislation also includes some constraints on the use of block grant funds and some conditions for the receipt of funds. In particular, it sets high standards for participation in work activities.

This summary is not comprehensive, and many provisions of the law have yet to be interpreted. However, it can help policymakers and administrators understand how their work first program model will fit into the context of the federal legislation.

Participation Requirements

Participation rates. States must meet the following minimum rates of participation for those receiving assistance:

	Participation Rate (%)	
Year	All Families	Two-Parent Families
1997	25%	75%
1998	30	75
1999	35	90
2000	40	90
2001	45	90
2002+	50	90

Reduction of the participation rates. The rates are reduced by the number of percentage points by which average monthly caseloads of the last fiscal year

are below FY 1995 caseloads. Caseload reductions due to changes in federal law or in eligibility criteria do not count toward reducing the participation requirement.

Calculation of the participation rates. The rate for a fiscal year equals the average of 12 monthly participation rates. The *numerator* equals the number of families receiving assistance that include an adult or minor head of household who is engaged in work (i.e., meeting the weekly hours requirement in allowable activities, defined below). The *denominator* equals the total number of families receiving assistance that include an adult or minor head of household minus those in sanction status (but not those sanctioned more than 3 months of the past 12 months). States can exempt single parents with a child under age one from participation, and then not count them in the calculation above for up to one year per person. States can choose whether or not to include individuals receiving assistance under a tribal family assistance plan.

Hours requirements. To count toward the participation requirements, parents must participate for at least the following number of hours per week:

	Number of Hours of Participation Per Week		
Year	All Families	Single Parents with a Child Under Six	Two-Parent Families
1997	20 hours	20 hours	35 hours
1998	20	20	35
1999	25	20	35
2000+	30	20	35

In addition, if a two-parent family is receiving federally funded child care assistance and an adult in the family is not disabled or caring for a disabled child, then in order to count toward the participation rates, the second parent must also participate for at least 20 hours per week.

Allowable Activities

At least 20 hours per week for all families and 30 hours per week for two-parent families must be spent in one or more of the following activities:

- Unsubsidized employment
- Subsidized private-sector employment
- Subsidized public-sector employment
- Work experience

- On-the-job training
- Job search and job readiness assistance (for up to six weeks total per individual—or 12 weeks if the state unemployment rate is 50 percent greater than the national rate—and not for more than four consecutive weeks; participation for three or four days in a week counts as a week toward the participation rates only once per individual)
- Community service programs
- Vocational educational training (up to 12 months per individual; see below for a description of the limitation on percentage of caseload in this activity)
- Provision of child care services to an individual participating in community service

The remaining required hours may be in the above or the following activities:

- Job skills training directly related to employment
- Education directly related to employment (only for those who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent)
- Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to a certificate of general equivalence (only for those who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent)

Teen heads of household can meet the participation requirements by maintaining satisfactory attendance in high school or the equivalent (without being subject to the specific hourly requirements) or by participating in education directly related to employment for at least the minimum number of hours per week.

No more than 20 percent of individuals in all families can meet the requirements by participating in vocational educational training or being a teen head of household in school.

Penalties for individuals. If parents refuse to participate, the state shall reduce assistance at least pro rata with respect to the period of noncompliance or terminate assistance (subject to good cause and other exceptions determined by the state).

States cannot reduce or terminate assistance for refusal to work if a single parent with a child under age six can prove an inability (as determined by the state) to obtain needed child care, for one or more of the following reasons: unavailability of appropriate child care within a reasonable distance from the individual's home or worksite; unavailability or unsuitability of informal child care by a relative or under other arrangements; unavailability of appropriate and affordable formal child care arrangements.

Penalties for states. A state's block grant will be reduced by up to 5 percent for not meeting the participation requirements, plus up to an additional 2 percent each immediately successive year in which the rates are not met, up to a maximum of 21 percent. (The exact amount is to be determined on the basis of the severity of the failure to meet the requirements.) If a state's grant is cut because of a penalty, it must replace the reduced funds with state funds in the next fiscal year. There are also rules and a process governing compliance and the imposition of penalties.

Other Work Provisions

Work required after two years. Among other things, the plan that states must submit in order to receive block grant funding must describe how the state intends to require parents to engage in work (as defined by the state) once they have received assistance for 24 months or once the state determines that they are ready to engage in work, whichever is earlier.

Community service required after two months. Not later than one year after enactment, states must require parents who have received assistance for two months, who are not meeting the participation requirements, and who are not exempt from those requirements to participate in community service employment. The minimum number of hours per week and community service tasks are determined by the state. States can opt out of this requirement.

Individual responsibility plan. States must make an initial assessment of the skills, prior work experience, and employability of recipients who are 18 or older, or who do not have a high school diploma or the equivalent and are not attending high school. On the basis of that assessment, states have the option of developing a plan that sets forth an employment goal, obligations, and services that are designed to move the recipient into private-sector employment as quickly as possible.

Other Related Provisions

Time limit. States cannot use federal block grant funds for families that include an adult who has received assistance (attributable to federal funds) for 60 months, whether consecutive or not. States can exempt up to 20 percent of the caseload from the time limit.

Teen parents. States cannot use federal block grant funds to assist an unmarried parent under 18 who has a child at least 12 weeks old and who has not completed high school (or its equivalent) unless the parent is in school, a GED program, or an alternative education or training program approved by the state. Block grant funds also cannot be used to provide assistance to an unmarried parent under 18 who is not living at home or in another adult-supervised setting, unless the state determines that such an arrangement is not appropriate.

Child care. Child care funding is consolidated into a block grant to states. At least 70 percent of mandatory funds must be used for families who are receiving assistance under the state's welfare block grant program, are in transition off assistance through work activities, or are at risk of becoming dependent on assistance. A "substantial portion" of any additional amount should be used to provide assistance to low-income working families.

Continuation of waivers. States can opt to continue one or more waivers that were in effect as of the date of enactment (August 22, 1996). Until the waiver expires, the legislation does not apply to the extent that it is inconsistent with the waiver. The same holds true for waivers submitted before enactment and approved by July 1, 1997, except that the work requirements still apply. States that choose to continue a waiver will still receive the same amount of block grant funding. States that request termination of a waiver no later than 90 days after the end of the first regularly scheduled legislative session after the bill becomes law will be held harmless for any cost-neutrality liabilities incurred under the waiver.

Appendix B

Programs, Organizations, and Contact Information

This appendix lists some programs and organizations from which you can learn more about various aspects of work first. The list is not intended to be comprehensive; it includes only those sources that contributed to or are mentioned in the text.

Programs[1]

America Works (Sections 27, 31). *General contact:* Richard Greenwald, Development Manager, 575 8th Ave., 14th Floor, New York, NY 10018; (212) 244-5627, Fax (212) 244-5628.

Atlanta Work First Program (Sections 1, 2, 4, 21). *General contact:* Sylvia Elam, Chief, State of Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services, 2 Peachtree St., 14th Floor, Suite 318, Atlanta, GA 30303; (404) 657-3737, Fax (404) 657-3755.

Center for Employment Training (CET) (Section 29). *General contact:* Bob Johnston, Planning and Research Director, 701 Vine St., San Jose, CA 95110; (408) 287-7924, Fax (408) 294-7849.

Columbus, Ohio, JOBS (Sections 17, 24). *General contact:* Leila Hardaway, Deputy Director for Community Opportunity Centers, 80 East Fulton St., Columbus, OH 43215; (614) 462-5818, Fax (614) 462-6329.

Connecticut Reach for Jobs First (Section 31). *General contact:* Amparo Stella Garcia, Connecticut Department of Social Services, 25 Sigourney St., Hartford CT 06106; (860) 424-5346, Fax (860) 951-2996.

Florida Family Transition Program (Sections 1, 9, 21, 28, 29, 36, 40). *Program planning contact:* Jan Blauvelt, Human Services Program Manager, Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, Economic Self-Sufficiency, P.O. Box 8420, Pensacola, FL 32505-0420; (904) 444-8159, Fax (904) 444-8332. *Program implementation contact:* Shirley Jacques, Program Operations Administrator, Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, Economic Self-Sufficiency, P.O. Box 8420, Pensacola, FL 32505-0420; (904) 444-5764, Fax (904) 444-5766. *Program activities contact:* Norman W. Cushon, Region IA Administrator, 700 South Palafox St., Suite 135, Pensacola, FL 32501; (904) 444-5860, Fax (904) 444-5850.

1. The numbers in parentheses indicate the sections of this guide in which the program is referenced.

Fond du Lac, Wisconsin (Sections 7, 29, 30, 35). *General contact:* Diane Hausinger, Deputy Director, Department of Social Services, P.O. Box 1196, 87 Vincent St., Fond du Lac, WI 54936; (414) 929-3433, Fax (414) 929-3447.

Grand Rapids, Michigan, JOBS (Sections 1, 2, 4, 9, 15, 21, 33). *General contact:* Jim Poelstra, Section Manager, 415 Franklin St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507; (616) 247-6147, Fax (616) 247-6100.

IndEx, Inc. (Sections 11, 30). *General contact:* Wayne Rowley, President, 616 South Boston Ave., Suite 100, Tulsa, OK 74119; (918) 560-0241, Fax (918) 585-8386.

Los Angeles, California, Jobs-First GAIN (Sections 18, 20, 26, 28 30, 38). *General contact:* John Martinelli, Chief of GAIN Division, Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services, 3629 Santa Anita Ave., El Monte, CA 91731; (818) 350-4743, Fax (818) 452-0627.

The Minnesota Family Investment Program (Sections 8, 36, 38). *General contact:* Chuck Johnson, Director, Minnesota Department of Human Services, 444 Lafayette Rd., St. Paul, MN 55155; (612) 297-4727, Fax (612) 297-5840. *Case management contacts:* Joan Truhler, Case Management Program Advisor, 444 Lafayette Rd., St. Paul, MN 55155-3837; (612) 297-5385, Fax (612) 215-1818, or Nancy Vivian, same address; (612) 296-5831, Fax (612) 215-1818.

The New Hope Project (Sections 30, 38). *General contact:* Sharon Schulz, Executive Director, 623 North 35th St., Milwaukee, WI 53208; (414) 342-3338, Fax (414) 342-4078.

Oregon JOBS (Sections 20, 23). *General contact:* Michelle Wallace, Deputy Manager for Field Services, Adult and Family Services, 500 Summer St. NE, Salem, OR 97310; (503) 945-6841, Fax (503) 373-7032.

Project Match (Sections 31, 34). *General contact:* Ria Majeske, Research Associate, Project Match, Erickson Institute, 420 North Wabash Ave., 6th Floor, Chicago, IL 60611; (312) 755-2250, ext. 2297, Fax (312) 755-2255.

Riverside, California, GAIN (Sections 1, 2, 4, 6, 15, 18, 21, 22, 26, 33). *General contact:* Marilyn Kuhlman, GAIN Program Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services, 4060 County Circle Drive, Riverside, CA 92503; (909) 358-3008, Fax (909) 358-3036.

Utah Family Employment Program (Sections 8, 9, 36, 37). *General contact:* John Davenport, Program Specialist, 120 North 200 West, Room 325, Salt Lake City, UT 84103; (801) 538-3968, Fax (801) 538-4212.

Vermont Welfare Restructuring Project (Sections 12, 18, 28, 30, 40). *General contact:* Jackie Levine, Commissioner Staff Assistant, Department of Social Welfare, 103 South Main St., Waterbury, VT 05671-1201; (802) 241-2852, Fax (801) 241-2830. *JOBS Program contact:* Steve Gold, Reach-Up Director, Reach-Up DSW, 103 South Main St., Waterbury, VT 05671-1201; (802) 241-2834, Fax (802) 241-2830.

Washington Works (Section 27). *General contact:* Amanda Madorno, Community Relations Director, 616 First St., 5th Floor, Seattle, WA 98104; (206) 343-9731, Fax (206) 343-5865.

Organizations and Agencies

American Public Welfare Association: 810 First St., N.E., Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4267; (202) 682-0100, Fax (202) 289-6555.

Center for Law and Social Policy: 1616 P St., N.W., Suite 150, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 328-5140, Fax (202) 328-5195.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: 820 First St., N.E., Suite 510, Washington, DC 20002; (202) 408-1080, Fax (202) 408-1056.

Child Care Action Campaign: 330 Seventh Ave., 17th Floor, New York, NY 10001; (212) 239-0138, Fax (212) 268-6515.

Child Care Law Center: 22 Second St., 5th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105; (415) 495-5498, Fax (415) 495-6734.

Children's Defense Fund: 25 E St., N.W., Washington, DC 20001; (202) 628-8787, Fax (202) 662-3510.

Curtis and Associates, Inc.: P.O. Box 206, Kearney, NE 68848; 1-800-658-4399, Fax (308) 237-7981.

Cygnet Associates: 101 Hickory Lane, Annapolis, MD 21403; (410) 280-5128, Fax (410) 626-1171.

Families and Work Institute: 330 Seventh Ave., 14th Floor, New York, NY 10001; (212) 465-2044, Fax (212) 465-8637.

National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies: 1319 F St., N.W., Suite 810, Washington, DC 20004; (202) 393-5501, Fax (202) 393-1109.

National Center for Children in Poverty: 154 Haven Ave., New York, NY 10032; (212) 927-8793, Fax (212) 927-9162.

National Governors' Association: 444 North Capitol St., Suite 267, Washington, DC 20001-1512; (202) 624-5327, Fax (202) 624-5313.

Greg Newton Associates: One Hanson St., Boston, MA 02118; (617) 426-5533, Fax (617) 426-5588.

Urban Institute: 2100 M St., N.W., Washington, DC 20037; (202) 833-7200, Fax (202) 331-9747. Please address LaDonna Pavetti or Pam Holcomb.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Susan Greenblatt, Chief, Technical Assistance Branch, Division of Self-Sufficiency, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families. 370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W., 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20447; (202) 401-4849, Fax (202) 205-5887.

U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Division of Labor Force Statistics, Room 4675, 2 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., Washington, DC 20212; (202) 606-6378, Fax (202) 606-6345.

Welfare Information Network: 1341 G St., N.W., Suite 820, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 628-5790, Fax (202) 628-4205.

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Selected Publications on MDRC Projects

Reforming Welfare

Books and Monographs

Reforming Welfare with Work (Ford Foundation). Monograph. 1987. Judith M. Gueron. A review of welfare-to-work initiatives in five states.

From Welfare to Work (Russell Sage Foundation). Book. 1991. Judith M. Gueron, Edward Pauly. A synthesis of research findings on the effectiveness of welfare-to-work programs. Chapter 1, which is the summary of the book, is also published separately by MDRC.

Five Years After: The Long-Term Effects of Welfare-to-Work Programs (Russell Sage Foundation). Book. 1995. Daniel Friedlander, Gary Burtless. An analysis of five-year follow-up data on four welfare-to-work programs.

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. Book. 1997. Dan Bloom. A summary and synthesis of lessons derived from studies of welfare reform programs.

ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. See under Books and Monographs.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Working Papers

Working Papers related to a specific project are listed under that project.

Learning from the Voices of Mothers: Single Mothers' Perceptions of the Trade-offs Between Welfare and Work. 1993. LaDonna Pavetti.

Unpaid Work Experience for Welfare Recipients: Findings and Lessons from MDRC Research. 1993. Thomas Brock, David Butler, David Long.

From Welfare to Work Among Lone Parents in Britain: Lessons for America. 1996. James Riccio.

Papers for Practitioners

Assessing JOBS Participants: Issues and Trade-offs. 1992. Patricia Auspos, Kay Sherwood.

Linking Welfare and Education: A Study of New Programs in Five States. 1992. Edward Pauly, David Long, Karin Martinson.

Improving the Productivity of JOBS Programs. 1993. Eugene Bardach.

Note: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses.

Reports and Other Publications

JOBS Programs

The JOBS Evaluation

An evaluation of welfare-to-work programs operating under the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) provisions of the Family Support Act of 1988.

From Welfare to Work (Russell Sage Foundation). See under Books and Monographs.

The Saturation Work Initiative Model in San Diego: A Five-Year Follow-up Study. 1993. Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton.

The JOBS Evaluation: Early Lessons from Seven Sites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS] and U.S. Department of Education [ED]). 1994. Gayle Hamilton, Thomas Brock.

Five Years After: The Long-Term Effects of Welfare-to-Work Programs. See under Books and Monographs.

The JOBS Evaluation: Adult Education for People on AFDC—A Synthesis of Research. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation [HHS, ASPE]). 1995. ED and HHS. Prepared by Edward Pauly.

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The JOBS Evaluation: How Well Are They Faring? AFDC Families with Preschool-Aged Children in Atlanta at the Outset of the JOBS Evaluation (HHS, ASPE). 1995. HHS and ED. Prepared by Child Trends, Inc.: Kristin Moore, Martha Zaslow, Mary Jo Coiro, Suzanne Miller, Ellen Magenheim.

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Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

The GAIN Evaluation

An evaluation of California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program, the state's JOBS program.

GAIN: Planning and Early Implementation. 1987. John Wallace, David Long.

GAIN: Child Care in a Welfare Employment Initiative. 1989. Karin Martinson, James Riccio.

GAIN: Early Implementation Experiences and Lessons. 1989. James Riccio, Barbara Goldman, Gayle Hamilton, Karin Martinson, Alan Orenstein.

GAIN: Participation Patterns in Four Counties. 1991. Stephen Freedman, James Riccio.

GAIN: Program Strategies, Participation Patterns, and First-Year Impacts in Six Counties. 1992. James Riccio, Daniel Friedlander.

GAIN: Two-Year Impacts in Six Counties. 1993. Daniel Friedlander, James Riccio, Stephen Freedman.

GAIN: Basic Education in a Welfare-to-Work Program. 1994. Karin Martinson, Daniel Friedlander.

GAIN: Benefits, Costs, and Three-Year Impacts of a Welfare-to-Work Program. 1994. James Riccio, Daniel Friedlander, Stephen Freedman.

Related Studies:

The Impacts of California's GAIN Program on Different Ethnic Groups: Two-Year Findings on Earnings and AFDC Payments. Working Paper. 1994. Daniel Friedlander.

Can They All Work? A Study of the Employment Potential of Welfare Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program. Working Paper. 1995. James Riccio, Stephen Freedman.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

The Evaluation of Florida's Project Independence

An evaluation of Florida's JOBS program.

Florida's Project Independence: Program Implementation, Participation Patterns, and First-Year Impacts. 1994. James Kemple, Joshua Haimson.

Florida's Project Independence: Benefits, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of Florida's JOBS Program. 1995. James Kemple, Daniel Friedlander, Veronica Fellerath.

Time-Limited Welfare

The Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

Implementing Time-Limited Welfare: Early Experiences in Three States. 1995. Dan Bloom, David Butler.

Florida's Family Transition Program

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The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit social policy research organization founded in 1974 and located in New York City and San Francisco. Its mission is to design and rigorously field-test promising education and employment-related programs aimed at improving the well-being of disadvantaged adults and youth, and to provide policymakers and practitioners with reliable evidence on the effectiveness of social programs. Through this work, and its technical assistance to program administrators, MDRC seeks to enhance the quality of public policies and programs. MDRC actively disseminates the results of its research through its publications and through interchanges with a broad audience of policymakers and practitioners; state, local, and federal officials; program planners and operators; the funding community; educators; scholars; community and national organizations; the media; and the general public.

Over the past two decades—working in partnership with more than forty states, the federal government, scores of communities, and numerous private philanthropies—MDRC has developed and studied more than three dozen promising social policy initiatives.

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